

EMPOWERING AND AFFIRMING WOMEN OF THE AME  
CHURCH TOWARD SERVING IN LEADERSHIP  
ROLES IN THE CONFERENCE

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EMPOWERING AND AFFIRMING WOMEN OF THE AME CHURCH TOWARD SERVING IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE CONFERENCE**

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The context for this project is the Women in Ministry within the New York Conference. Subtle and obvious rejection of women continues to prevail within the church. The problem is that women are still fighting to hold positions of high esteem and are continually being overlooked or considered for prominent positions in the church. Therefore, the project implementation using the research qualitative method affirmed the hypothesis that if women in ministry are provided with workshops where they can share their stories and are encouraged and supported, then they will be empowered to pursue leadership roles within the church.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I give God all the glory for allowing me to take this academic journey. One that I never thought I would do or could have achieved. I thank God for how he places people in our path as he knows the plans that he has for us. I thank God for the memories of my parents, Burchell and Imogene Stephens, whom I know would be very proud of this moment in my life.

I thank God for Justin Shamell, a recruiter for United Theological Seminary (UTS), whom I met at a chaplaincy conference and who convinced me to fill out the card, which led to a follow-up call from Dr. Witherspoon, a telephone call from Dr. Hudson, my application acceptance, and registration to United Theological Seminary. I thank God for an alumna of United, Dr. Sylvia Smith, who reminded me that she was a graduate of United and resides in Ohio. She offered her support, prayers, and her home if I could not afford to stay at the hotel.

I must also acknowledge a classmate, Kathy Newton-Dunton, to whom I will forever be grateful. We met on our first day on campus, and she spoke these words to me, “We are in this together.” During the time of my mother’s death, I was told that I should consider going on hold, Kathy encouraged me, supported me, and reminded me that “we were in this together.” Because of her encouragement, I made it through that semester and to this point of completion.

To another classmate at United who started with us but is now looking down, encouraging us to press on. I cherish the memories of Terrance Robinson, who started with us but now rests in glory. I would be amiss if I did not acknowledge my mentors, Dr. Jonathan McReynolds, Dr. Anita Coleman, and my former mentors Dr. Thomas Francis and Dr. Sharon Ellis Davis. Dr. Davis has been very instrumental on this journey. She always made herself available and gave good, sound advice. Dr. Francis, who always made himself available, and Dr. McReynolds for his guidance as he read through my papers. I must also acknowledge my co-workers at St. Mary's Hospital for Children, especially my immediate director, Desiree Borre, who understood the need for time off to attend week of intensives and mid-year meetings. I acknowledge Marianne Muzic who kept reminding me that I can do this.

I could not have done this work without my family, friends, and church family's help, support, encouragement, and love. To my children DaShaNa Lynch and Tenesha Johnson, grandson Josiah Johnson, granddaughter Madison Collins, who attempted to stay up at night with me as I wrote my papers. I am grateful to my daughter in ministry Lic Lei-Ann Mosby, a good girlfriend, Rev. Adunnola Waterman-French (current student at United Theological Seminary), Rev. Dr. Andrea Hargett, and Rev. Dr. Evelyn Miller-Suber (for writing my letters of recommendation), Rev. Dr. Aldrena Mabry, and Rev. Dr. Kim Anderson (facilitators for my project), and all the students of the Pastoral Care and Counseling Cohorts. To my current church members at Mt. Olive A.M.E. Church in Port Washington, New York and all the women who participated in the sessions for my project. Thank you all for your support, affirmation, and encouraging words of reminding me "it's already done."

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this doctoral dissertation first and foremost to the Lord Jesus Christ who has kept me when I did not know that I needed to be kept. Jesus covered, protected, and guided my every footstep. To my daughters and granddaughters, I pray that my journey in life has taught you that if you trust, believe, and wait on God, he will direct your path. To my deceased parents, Burchell and Imogene Stephens, thank you. You both are not here to witness what God has done in my life, but I know that your love for me has been my guiding force.

To my late aunt Lucille Allen who taught me the love of God, who took me to church week after week and instilled in me the love for the things of God, I say thank you. To my biological family, and to my sisters from another mother, you know who you are, thank you for your prayers, your words of encouragement and your support. Those Friday night prayer meetings in my basement, God was preparing me for this season.

Finally, to every woman and girl who has ever experienced being broken, being rejected, left out, ostracized, looked over and made to feel less than, this project is dedicated to you to let you know that you are God's creation. You are loved. You are intelligent. You are worthy. You are anointed; and you have been called by God. Do not allow anyone to cause you to lose your voice. You must show up knowing who you are; show up knowing that God has prepared you for where you are and where you are going.



You must show up and be the woman of God that you are. You are empowered, so go forth and serve.

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## INTRODUCTION

Healing, reconciling, and equality is not an impossible task for women who are in ministry. Becoming more aware and better understanding some of the issues within my context and the church has helped me to become more aware that reconciling, healing, and equality is of great possibility. Historically and biblically, women have always been looked upon or treated like a lower class, as less than. Women's roles and contributions have often been unacknowledged and unrecognized. However, I was encouraged as I viewed the scriptures that displayed where God treated his creation equally.

First, David informed me in Psalms 118:22, "the stones that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."<sup>1</sup> Second, the prophet Joel informed me that in the last days, God said that he would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. All flesh includes both male and female, and the third reading in Genesis chapter one also reminded me that God created humankind (male and female); and he looked upon them and said it was good. Although this declaration has not yet fully come, I believe it will come to pass, and equality will certainly come for all people, Black, White, males and females. The investigative study building the foundation for this doctoral project affirmed the hypothesis that if women in ministry are provided with workshops where they can share their stories and are encouraged and supported, then they will be empowered to pursue

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical citations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, Psalms 118:22.

leadership roles within the church. The following chapters delineate the foundational research supporting this doctoral project.

Chapter one, Ministry Focus, begins with primarily three areas: my spiritual autobiography, the contexts where I have previously and currently served, and the synthesis of these experiences that illuminate itself in my synergy. In essence, my project centers itself around the rejection and brokenness that women in ministry often experience, yet they go forth in doing the will of God. This is where my passion for ministry resides in providing support, affirmation, and encouragement to those who desire to serve in leadership positions, with confidence knowing who they are in God and will not allow anyone or anything to hinder the plan of God for them. My context is in an area where women in ministry are often overlooked for higher positions within the church or conference. Women in ministry who are highly educated, yet they are often overlooked from being assigned to large (or what is characterized as) number one churches. Women who are often not recognized by others because they are not in leadership. Some women now refrain from attempting to strive for these positions and just accept things for what they are.

Chapter two, Biblical Foundations, introduces the scripture Psalm 118:22, which states, “the stone that the builders rejected shall become the chief cornerstone,” which is a reminder that God is in complete control. A reminder that man continues to look at the outside, to judge and make decisions about women because of their gender, but God looks at the heart. The heart of one who is willing to serve him wholeheartedly. Women have become the cornerstone of the church, yet they are often not given the recognition they deserve.

Chapter three, Historical Foundations, focuses on a historical figure, the Rev. Jarena Lee, who was rejected by man “the builders” but has become the cornerstone. Mrs. Jarena Lee knew that God called her and followed the protocol of her church and denomination by sharing this information with her pastor. She was informed that according to the Book of Discipline (the book of doctrine for the church) there was nothing written about women being called to ministry, therefore, she was refused recognition of her calling.

Chapter four, Theological Foundations, engages Womanist Theology as the theology that supports the hypothesis. Both Black and White women rallied around the same phenomenon of pursuing equality for women within the church. Thus, Womanist Theology was born as Black women realized that they had other battles to fight, battles of racism and patriarchy. Womanist Theology allowed the voices of several Black women who were silenced in the church and society to share their voices openly.

Chapter five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, explicates the theory of psychology as it deals with the mind, our thinking, and our perception of self and others. This theory supports the hypothesis by examining the individual from childhood into adulthood, considering whether the individual experienced acceptance or rejection, which often carried over into adulthood and thus into ministry. Psychologically, after being in a position of not being offered or given the opportunity to utilize one’s knowledge or gifts can or may cause some people to regress, give up, or to be in a place of complacency. This theory also states that rejection is not always a form of action, but it is also how rejection is perceived by the individual, and how our sociocultural experience has taught us about rejection.

Chapter six, Project Analysis, summarizes the project details and the methodology used to capture the data supporting the hypothesis and it will highlight the workshop facilitators, session topics, and participant demographics. It provides a summary of findings on the data collected from the pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and journaling. This chapter will also provide details on the workshop materials and documented assessments of the participants.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces and converges my life experiences from my spiritual autobiography with the ministry context that led to the hypothesis for this doctoral project. After reviewing my spiritual autobiography and analyzing the needs of the context, I noticed a thread that took some time to acknowledge, and I still try to embrace it. However, for growth to occur and develop into a thorough doctoral project, I must embrace the process. The scriptures that came to mind as I reflected are “The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone...” (Matt. 14:21) and “Train up a child in the way [he/she] should go: and when [he/she] is old, [he/she] will not depart from it” (Prov. 2:2:6).

One may ask, if children are trained in the way that they should go, then why is it that when they are old, they do not walk in the boldness of God knowing who they are? Could it be because of the rejection that they endured? As a child growing up on the Island of Jamaica, I was poor yet did not know that at that time. I grew up in the church (Seventh Day Adventist) with an aunt who could not read. However, her daughter and I read her letters from her husband and other daughters who lived in England at the time. She was strict in every way. When it came to devotions on Friday nights, we had to read the scriptures correctly, and if not, she gave us a good slap across the face. I loved

the Pentecostal experience and would often sneak away to participate in their services without being physically present in their sanctuary, only to return home to receive a spanking and be told that I would get “the devil beat out of me.” At the same time, I was taught that God is love and that God loves me. Despite the physical abuse (spanking) and the negative words that she spoke to me at times, I grew up accepting it and believing that it was the custom, tradition, and nature of growing up in Jamaica.

What I failed to realize was that growing up with these events led to a sense of low self-esteem and the spirit of rejection had begun to take shape in me. As I was taught the Word of God that reads “Train up a child,” I turned my focus and everything toward God and the church. As a child, I would teach my friends on Sundays what I learned in Sabbath school on Saturdays. I was the teacher, although at times we took turns being the church schoolteacher. As I grew older, I continued to nurture that part of me that I now know sought the acceptance and love that was missing in my life.

As I migrated to the United States at age eleven and a half, now living with my birth mother and siblings, I had to adjust to a new lifestyle. My mother was not one who attended church, and neither were my siblings, so I was no longer being taught the things of God. Another challenge was being different from those around me both inside my house (family) and those outside the home. I was mocked because I was different. I had an accent and differed culturally from those around me when it came to clothing; what I wore was normal for where I came from but abnormal for girls my age here in the United States. I was mocked, and this ended in physical altercations with two classmates. The goal of one altercation was to convince others to reject my friendship. However, after the fights I gained popularity as everyone wanted to be my friend.



While in high school, another situation occurred while on a school trip. As a result of not following the crowd I was ostracized and talked about, and others were encouraged to not become my friend. I failed to date much, but in my first year of college I started dating, which resulted in the birth of my first child. That relationship did not last. A few years later, I met one whom I thought was the love of my life and married, and this union produced two children. There was infidelity in the marriage on my then husband's part. He was older and more experienced about relationships. I remained in the relationship simply because I did not want my children to grow up without a father and certainly did not want my son not to have a father figure in his life as his birth father was not present. I also felt like a failure and there was no one available to help me see or know that I was not a failure. There was no support, or encouragement from those around me who knew of our situation. My husband was both physically and emotionally abusive, yet I remained in the relationship. I felt at some point that this is what I deserved as there was never anyone who told me that I was pretty, that I was worth more than this, that I am somebody, and that I deserved more and better. After ending our marriage, he blamed me for the breakup and for years I believed it. At times, I still fight that demon by reminding myself that I am worthy, I am somebody, and that I have achieved a lot in my life since that break up. I continue to reach for the stars, even though no one ever told me to try to reach the stars and that if I fail to reach the stars at least I tried. No one ever told me this, so I grew up believing that the stars were for others and not for me.

This topic is of interest to me as I believe that if I had received more support and or encouragement from others—especially of those in authority—perhaps it might have been easier to walk in boldness to accomplish some things in ministry. I learned to

encourage myself and to see the God in me, which as the scripture states makes me great. The proposed project would utilize interviews, a questionnaire, a self-esteem building workshop, and discuss issues of grief as well as goal setting to increase women's sense of self-worth and empower them to be their best self in God.

To address these issues, I hypothesize that encouraging, supporting, affirming, and offering basic coping skills and skills for transitions in ministry to women will better equip and empower them to overcome the obstacles they encounter while pursuing the call of God upon their lives. My experiences as Spiritual Care Manager/Chaplain and social worker enables me to be a more empathetic listener, caregiver, helper, and it equips me with other talents and skills to assist the women in this healing process.

### **Context**

As a member of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, I can proudly say that we celebrated our bicentennial anniversary of the inception of our Zion, and I was blessed to be a participant in the celebration. This celebration took place in the same state of its inception, and we established a statue of the first elected and consecrated bishop of our church, Bishop Richard Allen. Participating in this awesome celebration was a phenomenal experience as we reflected and acknowledged the journey that we, as a people, men and women, endured and celebrated seeing the hand of God on God's church and God's people. Interestingly, this great church was started because of two men who were not allowed to kneel at the altar to pray, took a stand and walked out realizing that God had more in store for them. They were asked to get up, to go, and to sit in the balcony with the rest of the Black people, after which they thought about it and made the

decision to walk out. Surely, they lacked an expectation that their decision on that day would spread across the nation with the AME Church now covering twenty episcopal districts which encompasses Africa, India, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Caribbean.

The AME Church's motto is "God our Father, Christ our Redeemer, Holy Spirit our Comforter, Humankind our Family." God is the head of the church and we his people, Christ bought us back from sin, Holy Spirit comforts us when need, and as humankind, no matter your gender or sexual orientation, we are family. It is here, in the AME Church family where God made it clear to me that God called me to ministry. As I matured in the gospel of Jesus Christ in the AME Church, God made it clear that God had a plan for me that included being on the ordination track. I pursued the ordination track and received my first ordination in 2003. Upon completion of my seminary education, I was ordained again and receive my Elders Orders. Within the AME Church, receiving two ordinations is the norm. Upon receiving your Elders Orders, you become eligible to be assigned to the pastorate. Some Elders are assigned shortly after, but some are not. I was assigned to my first pastorate five years after receiving my Elders Orders. I was sent to a small congregation, where I followed a pastor who served that congregation for eighteen years.

Going into that setting was incredibly challenging. The people were used to a male pastor, whose behaviors were totally different from mine. From my childhood I understood that there are just certain things that persons avoid doing in the presence of a minister or avoid doing in the church. There were struggles as they dealt with having a new pastor, and not just having a new pastor, but a new pastor who was also a female.

Although he retired, the church was not prepared for my coming after my assignment to that church. They had no idea as to who the next pastor would be, and they hoped that him being replaced was not true as his retirement was unusual.

The congregation still mourned his leaving, which made it challenging for me to do many things. They wanted things to remain the same and they were unwilling to give this new pastor—someone who was also new to the pastorate—the opportunity to be the pastor. My first few years were extremely challenging as resistance was on every side, yet I pursued the things that God wanted us to do, and the necessary things according to our Book of Discipline. I prayed, fasted, and kept going. The opposition was great, yet I kept going. The people were broken. There was no love lost amongst many of them. There were times that I had to literally step in the middle of two women who were about to start fighting in the sanctuary. There were those who totally disliked each other and refused to work with each other.

I came to the church as the pastor on the Sunday after the previous pastor left, and clearly these behaviors were not new. The people had their own views as to how things should go, and persons wanted things a certain way. One group wanted me to go after the previous pastor because they believed that he mishandled things, and when I refused, I became the target of their frustrations. Another group consisted of persons who did not like each other, because they felt that they did not understand the AME Church well enough. To them, this lack of understanding came from a failure to travel within the AME circle to see and understand overall how the “church” operates, and as a result to them, these persons were not capable of making decisions. Needless to say, I felt like a failure. I cried many times before going to church and after church. I wondered and asked

God if this was of him, for me to be placed in this congregation and what were his plans for me being there. It was painful, but like my marriage, I remained. I was able to share this experience with a few others, but the encouragement I received was “keep praying,” “I am praying for you.” The one in whom I thought I would get encouragement, did not provide it, and so I remained. Low self-esteem, failure, spirit of rejection all were very familiar emotions that I experienced.

Six years later, I began to feel like the pastor of the church. Opposition still existed, but I grew into my role as a pastor and as “The Pastor” of that local church. We were a small church, but we did great things. God blessed us with a great support system with friends near and far, and thus we were also blessed financially. At our Annual Conference Meetings, I can recall feeling so small and so incompetent in comparison to my colleagues in ministry. Although I saw and knew that God blessed us as a church, persons always commented about the local church and about the pastor who failed to numerically grow the church over the conference year. No one mentioned the efforts of the pastor to maintain the church. These meetings diminished my self-esteem as the meetings acknowledged and recognized those whose churches increased numerically, and I felt like I did not belong. Unconsciously, I believe now that I relived my junior high years—those years when I first migrated to the United States and was in a new environment, new school, had an accent, failed to dress like the other students and experienced persons making fun of me. Other girls excluded me from their events leading to the two fights that I was engaged in.

Per the tradition of the AME Church, I was transferred from that local church to another church without notice. We were all present at one of our yearly meetings and the

buzz was heavy, with someone stating that “Bishop is going to make several moves; several pastors will be moved from their local church to another.” Like the others, I awaited the news as to who the bishop intended to move and where the bishop intended to move them. To my surprise, my name was called, and I was assigned to another small church. The pastor whom I followed was moved to a larger church. As a matter of fact, all the pastors were moved to larger churches. The pastor who was sent to my former church was also shocked that he was assigned there as he was in ministry for several years and had several hierarchical positions (some said that he was being punished).

Everyone was shocked when my name was called for my new assignment. The pastor whom I now followed had several of her family members who were members. As she was moved to the new church, her family traveled with her. The members although they were prepared and knew that she was going to be moved, they had no idea who would come. I was familiar with several of the members prior to being assigned to this charge, but this failed to change the fact that they received a new pastor. My current context is 116 years old and had thirty-two pastors. The longest-serving pastor was another female who served for eighteen years. Thereafter, a male served twelve years and those that followed served no more than five years. The pastor I followed, served for five years.

I was assigned on Saturday, June 17, and was required to be in the pulpit on the following day. On my first Sunday immediately after service, the previous pastor’s niece told me that she and her family would leave for vacation on Sunday and would join her aunt at her new church upon returning. The following week, the former pastor’s sister also asked for a letter of transfer. For several weeks thereafter, members (family and

friends of family) informed me that they intended to join their previous pastor at her new church. Some members also told me that they intended to leave and would probably join another denomination where the changes are not so abrupt. They did not like the idea of having a pastor and getting to know them when at any time that pastor could be reassigned to a new church. The membership declined over a short period of time. This left me trying to rebuild yet another broken membership. These members loved each other, failed to fight, or disagree with each other to the extent of producing an unwillingness to work with each other, nor abandoned me to go after any pastor, but they too were broken. The cycle of getting a new pastor, starting all over again, and getting to know their new pastor broke them.

At each meeting following my assignment to my new context, when I encountered leadership, I was asked about the church, after giving my response that we are moving right along, doing ministry, the response that I would hear back was, "That's not what I heard." At our annual meetings, for two years in a row, I received an appointment back to the church, but my assignments were not signed. One year, I received a signed appointment almost at the end of the conference year and the following year it was the same thing. This behavior had a tremendous impact on my self-esteem. I struggled with whether I should return the appointment that was invalid without a signature and allow the bishop to send someone new there. Maybe that was the plan, that I would reject the appointment; that I would give up or give in, and this way it would be noted that I walked away from the church.

As I pondered solutions to this dilemma, I believe that God wanted me to stay there as the people also needed a pastor. I believed that God made no mistakes, and that

God knew this in advance. I struggled, I cried, I prayed, I fasted, and I struggled even more. What should I do? I felt like I was back in time—the times of my marriage when my husband cheated on me and I remained in the relationship. I believed and told myself that the people needed a pastor, that I should not leave just because it was a small church, and that I should not walk away because I was being treated this way. Like in my marriage, I wanted my children to grow up with their father. I wanted my son to have a father figure in his life, so I suffered because of my low self-esteem. The spirit of rejection was very real, yet I remained in a situation that was neither fruitful nor encouraging.

The people were broken, and now I was being broken. While in my marriage, I was broken and still trying to heal from that brokenness. The people declared that when I am moved, they would join me wherever I am sent. I informed them and reminded them of the tradition of the AME Church; that each pastor has a non-verbal one-year contract and each appointment stated that we are assigned for the conference year. I reminded them that this will always be their home church and that pastors will come and go. As I continue to minister to the people through my brokenness, I learned to cope with the rejection, so I thought. As time passed, we worked together as a church and pastor to get things accomplished. I believe that the people who stayed grew to love me and I in turn grew to love them. However, I still struggled with the rejection I felt from leadership.

My bishop and supervisor, his wife, are very innovative and always on the cutting edge of things. During this pandemic they began utilizing technology and met with the members of this First Episcopal District—the churches that he oversees in Bermuda, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, New England, Western New York, and



Philadelphia—via Zoom. They also started daily early morning prayer at six o'clock in the morning. After one of our prayer meetings, he stated that he intended to start calling all his pastors and ministers, followed by all the evangelists. As one of the pastors, I expected to receive a call from my leader, but sadly that call never came. For several weeks after our prayer session, he shared some of the conversations that he had with a few of the pastors. One day he stated that he called all the pastors and was about to start calling the evangelists. I checked with just a few others—both male and female pastors—and those whom I asked, said that they received his call. At first, I came up with excuses as to why I failed to get a call, but as time progressed, I realized that he failed to regard me as an effective pastor.

Despite my own pain or struggle resulting from experiencing a spirit of rejection, I had to remain focused on the congregation to which I was assigned. This is a congregation of people who are loving, caring, and willing to work with me. Officers knew that I lacked a signed appointment, yet they still acknowledged me as their pastor. I was assigned to a congregation with people who work together to get things done. Resources were few as we were a small congregation that became smaller as members who were family members of my predecessor transferred and others left after deciding that they no longer desired to deal with changing pastors after a few years. Those who remained were AME's for an exceptionally long time, and although they did not like the constant changing of pastors, they decided that this was their church and they refused to leave. We worked together and continue to work together. Even amid this pandemic, with Covid-19 infecting members and leading to some deaths, we joined together even more in getting things done. They welcomed the use of technology, which was new to most of

them as most are elderly. One member informed me that she keeps record of all that we did since the pandemic. She stated, “Pastor, I am keeping track of the things that we are doing, in case someone asked what we have been doing?”

### **Ministry Journey**

My ministry journey began at the age of three when I asked to go and visit my aunt. She raised me in a Seventh-Day Adventist home, where my aunt was the head of the household. She could neither read nor write, whereas her daughter and I read and wrote all her letters to and from her husband and other children who resided in England. However, when we misread the scripture, the back of her hand met us as she slapped us for mishandling the Word of God. I learned to love and cherish the Word of God at an early age. I was taught that I can do all things through Christ, because there was nothing too hard for the Lord.

After migrating to the United States, I spent one month (June) in the sixth grade as I started school the end of May before being promoted to the seventh grade. Several teachers wanted to hold me back a grade as they felt there were not enough grades upon which to determine if I had sufficient academic knowledge for promotion. However, I had teachers who saw my abilities and I was promoted to the seventh grade. I continued my education and completed high school, until I became pregnant while in my first year of college. Shortly after giving birth to my son (two weeks later), I returned to college to finish my education. I attended a community college and had all intentions of obtaining my bachelor's degree. After some years, I met someone who after dating for some time I married, and that union produced two children. I put school on the back burner. However,

years later, I returned and completed my bachelor's degree and then attended seminary. A few years later, I returned to school again to pursue a master's degree in social work.

As a member of the AME Church, I learned that as you pursue the ordination track, that there were some educational requirements that were necessary. I enrolled in seminary, and after preaching my initial sermon, I was required to attend our Ministerial Institute. During the first year of our Ministerial Institute, which is listed as "Admissions Class," we were told that we needed to be enrolled in seminary and that we must have a total of twelve credits before our first ordination. Ordination took place after our second year in the institute, which is your third year in the institute. I was thankful that I had already enrolled and was attending seminary. Before entering the Ministerial Institute, I believe the Spirit of God had laid on my heart to attend seminary. I struggled with God about attending seminary as I did not understand why I had to attend. My question was, what am I going to do with a seminary degree? At that time not knowing that I would need it before my ordinations. I struggled with the question and the thought of going back to school again, even though I felt that God was leading me again to continue my education by obtaining a doctoral degree. I struggled and the same question arose again, why am I pursuing this degree, how is it going to benefit me? I can recall, as stated in my spiritual autobiography, that although I had a lot of chores to do in the mornings before school, getting an education was important to my aunt. Going to school and being there on time was important.

As I grew older both chronologically and spiritually, I began to see the hand of God on my life since the age of three. I thought I asked my aunt if I could come and visit, but it was God who orchestrated the plan for me to be in a place where I would learn

about him and where God would instill God's words into me. As a hospital chaplain in a hospital with medically fragile children, I could be compassionate and show empathy towards the parents as they hope above hope for better for their children. I believe that as a chaplain, God called me to show forth God's love, grace, and mercy to these parents and their children. What I bring to chaplaincy is the love that was shown to me over the years and still is.

Although I have experienced rejection, overlooked, and experienced brokenness, I learned over the years the importance of encouraging, affirming, and supporting those who are in need. I have learned that I cannot expect much from another human being, as they too might be experiencing the same, or was never taught how to show these emotions. I have come to understand that I can expect more of God because he has a plan for my life. That plan is to prosper me and not to harm me. God saw fit to call me to ministry, to serve his people and in spite of what others may try to do, God's hands are upon my life, and no one can change it.

Another gift I bring to the ministry is that I am a social worker. As a social worker for fifteen years – before being called to the ministry of Pastoral Care/Chaplaincy – I am able to reflect and see how God was at work in my life. Prior to being a social worker, I was in nursing. All these professions are ministry of helps, compassion and support. God was preparing me before I knew or recognized it for the office of pastoring. Pastoring requires a heart of compassion to help heal the broken hearted (nursing), to assist others in finding the appropriate help needed (social work), and at times, just be present, sometimes without a spoken word (chaplaincy). These combined experiences and

strengths have and are continuing to help me to recognize other women who are experiencing the same and provide the support and encouragement they may need.

When support and encouragement is provided, we are in a better place in achieving and growing into all that God has in store for us. I am currently in the process of writing a children's book entitled "*I Am Who I Am*," a book of affirmations dedicated to my granddaughter. Every young girl, especially young Black girls, will need this book to instill in them who they are. As African Americans, we are often led to believe that we are not good enough. Furthermore, to be female, even in this society in the twenty-first century, African Americans and African American women in the church are still struggling to find their place, struggling to overcome the obstacles of life and society. So, we must try harder to accomplish what others, Caucasian males/females, or even African American men, are expected to achieve or possess.

### **Synergy**

Although I was taught the Word of God, I learned of God as being a big God who was up in heaven and was ready to punish me if I failed to do certain things. I had both a natural fear and reverence type of fear of God. I believe that as a child, my natural fear of God was greater than my fear of reverence for who God is. I truly wish that I was also taught that, I am because of who God is and that I am beautiful, I am smart, I am loving, I am exceptional, and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me because I am a Black girl and I rock.

As one who my aunt physically abused as a child with beatings, I also suffered as I got older and married my husband only to experience rejection when infidelity entered

the marriage. I also suffered as he consistently blamed me for the end of our marriage. I felt like a failure. During those times, there was no one to support or encourage me. I felt so alone during those years after our failed marriage with children to raise. I not only encountered abuse and rejection in my preteen years, but also as a young adult in my marriage, and then in my late adult life in the church. The church is the one place that I should feel loved, the one place that I should feel accepted, the one place I was taught that God dwells, and God is love. So where is the love? Where can I find acceptance?

I am now employed as a spiritual care manager/chaplain, and this is where I find acceptance. The vulnerable accept me as I am, embrace me, and encourage me. As I walk into a patient's room, whether the child is verbal or not, my touch brings them comfort. As I enter the room, the parent/guardian/family member at the bedside welcomes my presence and receives me as I am. I feel no need to pretend or do anything to receive the love from the children. Within my local church, persons accept me as the pastor. I am respected and receive love from each congregant. However, as part of the "church, the AME Church," experiencing such constant rejection from those in authority makes it challenging at times to accept the love from the congregation; not because they fail to give love, but I erected a wall that at times making it challenging to accept the love from the church and the members.

Based on my ministry journey and the needs of the context, this ministry project provided workshops to address issues of healing wounds and increasing self-worth to empower women toward more effective work within the church setting. Therefore, to address these issues, the hypothesis established that encouraging, supporting, affirming, and offering basic coping skills and skills for transitions in ministry to women will better

equip and empower them to overcome the obstacles they encounter while pursuing the call of God upon their lives.

The general nature and content of the proposed project will involve the use of interviews, questionnaires, a self-esteem building workshop, issues of grief and goal setting. The interviews and questionnaires would explore how many women were told or made to believe that they were not enough; that they were not capable of being their best selves. They would also explore if as women they ever felt rejected and the circumstances surrounding feeling rejected. The intent of goal setting would be to help them set attainable goals for themselves. Starting with the small things, this would build their confidence, which will help them in accomplishing bigger things. I will utilize storytelling through interviews, pre/post surveys, and observations to prove this hypothesis.

Consequently, I believe that if I received more support and or encouragement from others – especially from those in authority – perhaps it could have made it easier for me to walk in boldness to accomplish some things in ministry. For this reason, I am passionate about this ministry project.

I learned to encourage myself, to see the God in me, and to talk to myself that greater is God who is in me than that which is in the world. I had to rely and depend on what I knew and pushed forward despite what others perhaps thought about me. When I reflect on my childhood and young adult life (broken marriage), I stand amazed that I am still here. I experienced the feeling of being insufficient to hold my marriage together, and insufficient in the church of my leader who refused to give me a signed appointment at the time that others received theirs. During the pandemic, he again “dissed” me—as the

children would say or at least used to say. Yet I continue. I continue to attend meetings with a smile on my face, and I continue to pastor and lead God's people at the church where eventually my appointment was signed to serve. My interest is in edifying and encouraging young women who are not only going into ministry but all young women—especially those of the African diaspora—as to who they are, and not to allow others or anything to define them.

As a hospital chaplain, I am well received and respected. My directors, supervisors, and colleagues all respect who I am and respect who I am not. They respect what I bring to the table and although much is expected from me there, there is a sense of honor. We are in this together as we work together to meet the needs of the patients and their families. At times, I feel more at ease in this role than I do as a pastor in the local parish. However, I know and understand that the people whom I serve in the local church love and respect who I am. I also know that they too deserve someone who will love and respect them in return and will treat them the way that they should be treated. This is something that I learned about both my contexts—the local church and the hospital setting. I learned and adapted to the culture of rejection in the pastoral setting from my leader and the acceptance and respect from my leaders in the hospital setting.

Through this doctoral project, I seek to learn why I failed to walk in the things of God, as well as when and where I lost my confidence and self-esteem. I am hoping that through the workshops, listening to their stories, confidential interviews etc., that these women may not have to experience what I had experience. That they will be encouraged to walk in their gifts, know who they are, their confidence will be built up knowing that there is nothing that can keep them from achieving all that God has in store for them. I



am also looking to learn for myself why I am so self-conscious about so many things, that have been a stumbling block for me. I also hope to learn through this doctoral project how to become a better mentor to younger women and to assist others in accomplishing their goals.

### **Conclusion**

The general theme and content of this project is to help women to walk in their godly assignments with boldness. God called them for such a time as this. This project aims to help them understand that although others perhaps rejected them, God knows and is willing to do great things with them, to walk according to the scripture that states: “The stone which the builders rejected, shall become the chief cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22).

My spiritual autobiography and the contextual analysis reminded me that this was the theme of my life. I always thought that the theme that ran through my life was “Train up a child in the way that they should go, and when he/she is old, he/she will not depart from it” (Prv. 22:6). In other words, I thought and still do believe that from an early age, God prepared me for ministry, for pastoring, and for chaplaincy. I grew to love the word of God and to take God’s word seriously during my early years living with my aunt. As I continue to reflect, I also must admit that enduring some obstacles and even rejection is a part of the process of ministry. The scripture states, “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?” (Jer. 12:5). The next chapter will introduce the scripture that supports the biblical foundation for this project.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The scripture selected for the biblical foundation supporting this doctoral project is Psalm 118:21-25, focusing on verse twenty-two,

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation, The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

The author of this Psalm is unknown, but the Psalm itself is a song that expresses Thanksgiving to God for whose love never changes. The first four verses end with the sentence: "His steadfast love endures forever."

I understand that God's love is always consistent in all things and at all times. The word endure means to withstand, persist, and continue. It is key for us to try to grab hold of that as we build who we are, and that love is our foundation. This Psalm was used at Passover as a way of reminding the children of their deliverance from Egypt. God is seen as a deliverer as noted in the following verses. "When hard pressed I cried to the Lord; He brought me into a spacious place. The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me: The Lord is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies." (Ps. 118:5-7)

The framing of who we are is not dependent on others. However, we must know we have been impacted by others and events in our lives. These things can be positive or

negative. The Psalmist says in verses eight and nine, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princess.”

Since biblical times, gender played a key role in determining the lived experiences of women. While advances were made to improve the plight of women overall in providing more equity, patriarchy lives. The male voice still has strong influence over how persons see and hear women and what roles are suitable for females to occupy in the twenty-first century. In essence, the female voice, particularly the female pastoral voice, still struggles to be heard, seen, and affirmed in a male-dominated society and specifically in the church. Apparently, persons continue to reject or misunderstand the words of Apostle Paul who states, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Heb. 3:28). For Paul and every believer – who are baptized in God’s divine Spirit – distinctions such as these no longer exist because all are one in Christ.

Since persons continue to reject the female pastoral voice, this scripture foundationally speaks to the lived rejection and experiences that many female pastors and preachers oftentimes encounter when functioning in a male-dominated pulpit. The continual rejection of female pastors or preachers causes one to wonder, where is the adherence to the biblical text regarding God’s word upon both sons and daughters? For Luke records, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). This is also quoted in the Old Testament “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters

shall prophesy, your men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit” (Jl. 2:2).

Women tend to experience rejection even more in the church, especially when or where that church has a bias in favor of male leadership. Oftentimes, women within these churches take a backseat, or are given roles limited to support or helping ministries; and are not given lead, appreciative or acknowledgeable roles as their male colleagues. Although some women are gifted in administration, leadership, spiritual gifts, and prophesy, while others are natural helpers and or supporters, they are not supported and continue to experience rejection within the church. Those who are gifted in administration, leadership, and desire to walk in their giftings, they are not supported. While this chapter focuses explicitly on the rejection of women in the pulpit, rejection of women exists in many forms and is not a new phenomenon. Being rejected is one of the most damaging and painful experience that could happen to anyone, male or female; and to experience it within the church can be more damaging. The Bible – both Old and New Testament – provides evidence of rejection in many places. For example, Genesis 37:1-28, tells of Joseph’s brothers rejecting him because their father favored Joseph. Jacob, Joseph, and David each suffered rejection before their elevations, and this also applies to Jesus in the New Testament. He was rejected because his origin was not approved (Jn. 7:52), because of his lack of formal education (Jn. 7:15), due to his disregard for religious traditions (Lk. 6:2), and due to his choice of friends (Mt. 9:11), yet Jesus became the cornerstone of Christian salvation.

Statistics show that women constitute more than 85% of the members of congregations. Consequentially, while men receive more accreditation, women are the

keepers of the sanctuary – spiritually, financially, and physically. Since rejection is a lived experience of the female voice, within my context such rejection resulted in spiritual, emotional, and personal injury that destroyed self-esteem, limited spiritual growth, and diminished opportunities to serve. Providing workshops of affirmation, encouragement, and support to the women of this context hopefully will increase their self-esteem, their desire to press forward despite the challenges that they may encounter. These workshops will affirm, empower, and strengthen these women to embrace God’s call upon their lives. Also, providing these workshops will enable them to live more fully and confidently as the daughters of God in the twenty-first century body of Christ.

This chapter used the voices of biblical scholars of both the Old and New Testament texts to further the conversation and understanding of the God who sees, hears, and calls those whose hearts are turned toward God. One sees this truth in how God called Mary, the mother of Jesus, because her heart was readily and willing to do God’s will as she stated, “behold the servant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word. And the angel left her” (Lk. 1:38). This chapter provides an exegetical analysis of Psalm 118:21-25, and compares scriptures through authorship, journeys through the meaning of the Psalms and context, and examines the relationship between the stone, cornerstone, and builders in both the Old and New Testaments.

## **Exegetical Analysis**

### *Authorship and Recognition*

The book of Psalms, referred to as the Psalter, is a collection of 150 prayers, songs, liturgies, and poems. A variety of anonymous authors composed the

various psalms. The book of Psalms is an anthology of songs, poems and prayers that were sung, spoken, and prayed by individuals in many communities in a large variety of social and historical settings. The 150 Psalms of the Psalter are divided into five books, each of which closes with a verse or more of doxological praise. It is often stated that the Masoretic Text of the Psalter contains 150 psalms and in fact, the Psalter presented Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) does present a 150 poems layout. But recent research by scholar William Yarchin has shown the matter is not so clear of the 150 poems layout of the psalms.

His research shows that both Codex Aleppo and Codex Leningrad divided the verses of the Psalter into 149 psalms as the result of conjoining Psalms 114 and 115 into a single psalm. The English terms “Psalm” and “Psalter” relate to the Greek words psalmoi and psalterion. The term psalmos is in turn a translation of the Hebrew mizmor. Both terms mean “song.”<sup>1</sup> Also, “The bulk of the psalm exhibits the form of an individual thanksgiving song (vv. 5-19, 21, 28).”<sup>2</sup> At verse twenty-two, “the lay commoners join in the praise, reacting rather like the chorus in a Greek play to the king’s spiritual interpretation of his escape from crisis and brush with death (v. 5, 17).”<sup>3</sup> To aid their praise they evidently cited a proverb that express transition from humiliation to honor in which a generally discarded stone stabilizes two adjacent walls.

Codex Alexandrinus employs psalterion, which refers to a stringed instrument. The plural Greek form, psalmoi, occurs in the ancient manuscript Codex Vaticanus as the title for the book. The two terms accurately describe the contents of Psalms – a set of

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 163, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=4860097>.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 21, *Psalms 101-150* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), 163, 167.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 167.

songs that persons used at some point in the worship life of ancient Israel-Judah.<sup>4</sup> John Goldingay writes that “Psalms make it possible to say things that are otherwise unsayable.”<sup>5</sup> Psalms – a book of prayers, songs, and poetry – allows persons to express their emotions that they oftentimes cannot bring themselves to say. When overwhelmed, and feeling wrongly accused, persons can find a Psalm that speaks to their situation such as “Vindicate me, O Lord, For I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering” (Ps. 26:1).

Everyone can attest to the fact that one of the first scriptures that children learn is Psalm chapter twenty-three. Psalms greatly calms and when in distress persons can turn to the Psalms for comfort, encouragement, and affirmation. Children grow up without concern for the authorship of scripture, but instead learn the verses trying to understand the meaning behind it. However, upon growing and studying, persons in both the pre-modern and modern periods learned to pay close attention to the authorship and historical background of each Psalm.

From antiquity, communities of faith began to associate the Psalter with King David. This began because of the link between the tradition of David as a musician (1 Sm. 16:14) and the nature of the psalms as songs.<sup>6</sup> The Talmud reported that “David wrote the Book of Psalms, including in it the work of the elders, namely Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, Heman, Yeduthun, Asaph and the three sons of Korah.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 167.

<sup>5</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 167.

<sup>6</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 167.

<sup>7</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 167.

The New Testament also associates David with the New Testament (Mk. 12:35-37; Acts 2:35).<sup>8</sup>

Several New Testament scriptures quote Psalm 118:22-23, including when Jesus quotes this psalm Matthew 21:42, which reads “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scripture: “The Stones which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing. And it is marvelous in our eyes?”’” (Mt. 21:42). Jesus references this Psalm in the parable of the wicked vinedressers. The vinedresser sent men to collect, but the tenants killed everyone he sent. Finally, he sent his son thinking they would not kill his son, but the tenants killed the owner’s son as well. They believed that when the owner comes that he would repay them by destroying them and then lease his vineyard to someone else who would give to him the fruit in their season. Then Jesus quotes the scripture to them.

The Gospel of Matthew was attributed to the gospel writer Matthew. Matthew’s position amongst the gospels is that Matthew is an emphatically Jewish gospel. Matthew moves in a thought-world resembling that of the emerging rabbinic movement, more than the other Synoptic Gospels.<sup>9</sup> The Gospel of Matthew was written to the Greek Jewish Christians between AD 50 and 90, perhaps in the 70s. Matthew presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah sent by God to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy. Matthew was also called Levi and his audience was Greek speaking Jewish Christians. He referred to Jesus

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<sup>8</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 167.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener, *NKJV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 1664.



as the Jewish Messiah sent by God to fulfill the Old Testament prophesy. Therefore, it is not strange for him to quote a scripture from the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup>

As referenced above, Matthew documents a parable that Jesus speaks, and in this parable, Jesus quotes the Psalm 118:22. Scholars referred to this reference as Jesus being the stone or Jesus being the salvation by whom the world will be saved. Jesus was despised by many, beaten, crucified, and died. He was rejected yet he understood the reason for which God sent him. Despite the abuse and the rejection, he laid down His life so that all—even those who rejected him—might be saved. Unlike the owner of the vineyard, (although scripture does not say that the owner destroyed the vinedressers), Jesus accepted all, he became the chief cornerstone, and it was the Lord's doing to redeem persons from their sins by giving them eternal life.

### *The Text*

Psalm 118 is sandwiched between the shortest and longest Psalm – Psalm 117 and Psalm 119. Persons used Psalm 118 in both Jewish and Christian religious life. Gerstenberger writes that the Psalm “abounds in liturgical forms and rhythmic, repetitious, formulaic phrases and shouts.”<sup>11</sup> Psalm 118 is known as a song of Thanksgiving of one who experienced divine deliverance and passed through a crisis such as a severe illness. Some speculate that this psalm reflects a temple liturgy for those who came to the Temple to fulfill vows of thanksgiving uttered during times of crisis.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Walton and Keener, *NKJV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, 1667.

<sup>11</sup> deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 10-24, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Petersen, *The New Interpreter's Bible One-Volume Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 342.

All four of the New Testament gospel writers note portions of Psalms 118. The New Testament quotes or alludes to the words of verse twenty-two in many places and appropriates the words of that verse as a metaphor for Jesus in the early church (Mk. 12:10-11, Acts 4:11, Eph. 2:20-21, 1 Pt. 2:4-8).<sup>13</sup>

Scholars report the following:

Psalm 118 does not have an author in its title, however, there is reason to believe it was King David, the Sweet Psalmist of Israel. Ezra 3:10-11 suggests that Psalm 118 was sung at the founding of the second temple, and when they sang it, they attributed it to David (“according to the ordinance of David King of Israel,” Ezra 3:10). “Most probably David was the author of this psalm... Though this was likely David’s Psalm, it was also Jesus’ psalm. “This is pre-eminently the triumph song of the Christ. He is the ideal Servant. He is the perfect Priest; He is the Leader of the people. How much all these words meant to Him as He sang them on that night in the upper room.” (G. Campbell Morgan).<sup>14</sup>

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) records Psalm 118:22 this way: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” The Message Bible records this verse this way: “The stone the masons discarded as flawed is now the capstone” (Ps. 118:22 MSG). In both translations it states that the one that the builders (leaders) rejected, discarded, excluded, and abandoned is now the strong one or the one who stands to support you. Verse twenty-two is the verse of emphasis for this doctoral project, because it shows that although persons may fail to affirm, encourage, or support you, knowing that God called you and that you are walking in the calling on your life is important. The scripture was cited for use as a proverb to aid their praise that expresses a transition from humiliation to honor, in which a generally discarded stone became the

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<sup>13</sup> deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> David A. Guzik, “Psalm 118 – The Chief Cornerstone,” Enduring Word, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-118/>.

foundation stone that stabilizes two adjacent walls. Psalm 118 is a psalm of victory and thanksgiving.<sup>15</sup> It has been noted to be a truly remarkable and beautiful poem.

The “New Exodus Motif” reported that Psalm 118 belongs to the so-called “Egyptian Hallel Psalms (Ps. 113-118).”<sup>16</sup> Psalm 118 provided songs that persons sang during major Jewish feasts of the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Tabernacles. This psalm especially related to the feast of the Passover, which serves as a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>17</sup>

To many scholars, how and when this psalm was composed remains a mystery. Most believed that it was composed in the post-exilic era as a liturgy intended as part of a festival of thanksgiving. Throughout the New Testament writers quote Psalm 118, a psalm of thanksgiving and victory. The synoptic writers concentrate on Psalm 118:22-23, 25-26.<sup>18</sup> As the Synoptic writings use Psalm 118:22-23, the context changed. Within the New Testament, the meaning was changed to reflect an interpretation relating to Christology. Within the Old Testament, the stone in Psalm 118:22 stone refers to the nation of Israel or Israel’s King, and in the New Testament it refers to Jesus the Christ. Psalm 118:22 is one of the favorite parts of Psalm 118 among the early Christian writers. At least ten times in early Christian literature one finds this verse (Mk. 8:31, Mk. 12:10-

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<sup>15</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 1798.

<sup>16</sup> Hyuk J. Kwon, “Psalm 118 (117 LXX) in Luke-Acts: Application of a ‘New Exodus Motif,’” *Verbum et Ecclesi* 30, no. 2 (September 2009): 1, DOI:10.4102/ve.v30i2.59.

<sup>17</sup> Kwon, “Psalm 118 (117 LXX) in Luke-Acts,” 1.

<sup>18</sup> Kwon, “Psalm 118 (117 LXX) in Luke-Acts,” 3.

11, Mt. 21:42, Lk. 9:22, Lk. 17:25, Lk. 20:17, Acts 4:11, Rom. 9:32-33, Eph. 2:20, 1 Pt. 2:7, Gl. 66, Barn. 6:2-4).<sup>19</sup>

This psalm of victory and thanksgiving celebrates deliverance, and one can divide it into two sections: verses five through eighteen and nineteen through twenty-eight. Salvation is God's wondrous act in verses twenty-two and twenty-eight. It also causes one to ask how this verse shows God's salvation. Verse twenty-two states, "The stone the builders rejected, shall become the chief cornerstone" (Ps. 118:22). The image of the cornerstone is derived from the way in which masons choose the stone for key positions of structure. Within Psalm 118:22, it stands for Israel. Isaiah 28:16 mentions that although imperial neighbors might consider the stone unimportant, Israel plays a very distinguished role in the architecture of God's reign. The builders – the nation's rulers – despised the Jews and sought their annihilation. However, at the dawn of redemption all nations will realize that Israel is the "cornerstone" of world redemption.<sup>20</sup> Kraus describes Psalm 118 as the thanksgiving of a private individual.<sup>21</sup> Gunkel adds that this psalm is set in the context of the congregation.<sup>22</sup> Most exegetes from this school of thought identify the individual as the Davidic king.

As previously mentioned, within this patriarchal society women are neither acknowledged nor recognized. The voices of women in ministry are often diminished as they fail to play major roles within their denominations. Like the Jews whom others

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<sup>19</sup> Kwon, "Psalm 118 (117 LXX) in Luke-Acts," 3.

<sup>20</sup> Kwon, "Psalm 118 (117 LXX) in Luke-Acts," 3.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1989), 15.

<sup>22</sup> H. Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*, *Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985), 12.

sought to annihilate, in God's time the builders learned that they were the cornerstone. Within the AME Church, women are often assigned to the smaller congregations that most often cannot afford to pay their pastors. Women are often on the bottom in the lineup for promotion and women are often not offered positions of leadership. However, in God's architecture of the church women are the cornerstone.

John Fuhrmann in his work on the "Parable and the Wicked Tenants" (Mt. 12:1-12), notes that this passage quotes Psalms 118:22-23 to illustrate the authority of God. The article states that a landowner prepares a vineyard, leases it to tenants, and goes away for a time. At the time of harvest, he sent his servants to collect, and they were attacked, beaten, and even killed. Then he sent his son (the stone) to collect. The tenants also attacked and beat the son, which leads the landowner to impose judgement upon the tenants. The son represents the stone, the tenants represent the builders, and the Lord represents the owner of the vineyard. The rejection of the stone is not the last word. The stone will be vindicated by becoming the chief cornerstone.<sup>23</sup>

Within the Psalms, scholars note that some of the speakers who addressed God were women (Ps. 131). Outside the book of Psalms, the Bible portrays prominent women as singing hymns in Israel's worship including Miriam (Ex. 15:20-21) and Deborah (Jgs. 5). In Psalm 148:12-13 commands women to praise Yahweh.<sup>24</sup> The *Women's Bible Commentary* notes that since biblical times, the Psalms nourished and enriched the prayer lives of women in public and private worship. Jewish and Christian women alike found

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<sup>23</sup> Justin M. Fuhrmann, "The Use of Psalm 118:22-23 in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants," *Proceedings* 27 (January 1, 2007): 67.

<sup>24</sup> Carol A. Newson and Sharon H. Ringe, *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 138.

their thoughts, their needs, and their life experiences reflected in the texts of the Psalms. In the biblical text, five women (Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Judith, and Mary) respond to significant circumstances in their lives with psalm-like songs and prayers.<sup>25</sup> Each reflects on the experiences of their lives and use a psalm to give thanks and praise God for turning around the unhappy circumstances of her life.

This shows the power of the psalm that can help persons to change their perspectives on that which they face. This pericope of Psalm 118:21-25 is a passage of praise and thanksgiving, as is the entire Psalm. In verse twenty-one, the author writes, “I will praise you for you have answered me and have become my salvation” (Ps. 118:21 NKJV). Then verse twenty-two discusses salvation as it states, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22, NRSV). The following verses state “This is the Lord’s doing: It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you give us success!” (Ps. 118:23-25 NRSV). As a woman, reflecting on this psalm comforts me as it is a reminder that God hears and answers my prayers. Many may reject us, but we are the cornerstones of God’s plans for our lives, and therefore, it is marvelous in God’s eyes.

### **Conclusion**

As I move through the formulation of this research project, the selected scripture of Psalm 118:22 spoke volume to me by reminding me of God’s plans for my life. This scripture teaches that although others may fail to support women, not just in ministry but

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<sup>25</sup> Newson and Ringe, *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 138.

in other areas of life, following God's guidance will lead to a life that will be marvelous in God's eyes. Both the Old and New Testaments – in Isaiah, Joel, and Acts – record these words: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions" (Jl. 2:28 NRSV). The scripture says sons and daughters shall prophesy (declare the Word of God). This scripture fails to mention daughters seeing the vision, or having the dreams, but it declares that daughters shall prophesy. A woman was sent to go and tell the disciples that Jesus rose from the dead.

A male preacher once stated that he found it very interesting that it was a woman who carried the "Living Word – Jesus," yet persons hinder women from preaching the Word of God. The number of women in ministry increased over the years. Yet women face many obstacles as they attempt to navigate these uncharted waters. Women answer the call of God every day despite the obstacles that they face from both men and other women within their congregations. Women often face the prospect of making hard decisions regarding when or whether to walk in the things of God or care for their families.

Despite the challenges that women face while pursuing ministry, they continue to answer the call to ministry. Persons accept women if they remain in roles such as the missionary president, the choir director, or any other leadership role within the church. The moment she acknowledges her call to ministry, the response from others changes and they expect so much more. Patriarchy still lives within the walls of the church, even though God declares that in the last days, God will pour out God's Spirit on ALL flesh. Is this inclusive of women? As stated, Psalm 118 states that "The stone that the builders

rejected, shall become the chief cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22). Some scholars state that the Jews were rejected, yet they were the ones who became the cornerstone and the foundation as God’s chosen people. In Matthew 21:42, Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22. Per some scholars, Matthew refers to Jesus being the stone that was rejected, yet Jesus was our cornerstone or the foundation for our salvation. Jesus used this text in His first sermon along with Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, and 1 Peter 2:4-8. He says, “As you come to him, the living stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup>

Although women have come a long way, there is still a long way yet for them to go. Women are the backbone of churches, yet some of them are left out, looked over, and discouraged from moving forward in ministry. From a noticeably young age, women are not encouraged to pursue ministry. King David was overlooked due to his size and was rejected but became the cornerstone or the foundation as he became king. Two children – a little boy and a little girl – are given the same recitation for the Christmas play. The little boy is dressed up with his shirt and bow tie and the little girl with her pretty dress. After the little boy’s recitation, the congregation praises him and declares that he is going to be a preacher or pastor. After the little girl’s recitation, she too receives praise, but not as much as the little boy. Several members tell her that she is going to be a great missionary or evangelist. No one speaks over her these words, “one day you are going to be a preacher. You spoke just like a preacher. You will make a great pastor one day.”

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<sup>26</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 3, *Psalms 107-150* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 961.



Although she articulated her recitation more clearly and with distinction, no one encouraged her the way they encouraged the little boy.

From a very young age, women struggle for their rightful places and their opportunities to show that they are just as qualified as or even more qualified than some of their male counterparts. However, Psalm 118:21-25 – especially verse twenty-two – reminds the reader that although you are rejected by man, you are created for God's purpose. In my context, women are more likely to be assigned to the smaller churches, churches that struggle to pay their pastors. Women are not given primary consideration for larger congregations, not appointed to lead positions within the denominations, and certainly not encouraged. Women are paid less, and even after following a male pastor many churches would attempt to pay the female pastor less than what was paid to the (their) male pastors. Most of the men, especially the younger men, will not accept the charge to a small congregation. If they do, they remain there no more than one year. Whereas most women are left in these charges (churches) for years and reprimanded if the church fails to grow numerically.

Amid a patriarchal society, women are still trying to find their place. They still search and strive to be better than their male counterparts as they know that their promotions will not come with ease. However, gladly more and more women are beginning to avoid waiting for an invitation to the table, but some of us are willing to bring our own chairs to the table as this is the only way for us to sit at the table. Yes, the stone (women) that the builders (patriarchy) rejected, they (women) shall become the chief cornerstone. We are the stakeholders, the foundation of the church. We are the rock, the pillars of the church. Although we continue to be left out or overlooked, we will

continue to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. We will continue to press towards the mark of a high calling in Christ Jesus, knowing that our labor is not in vain. We as women who have been called to serve in the ministry of Jesus Christ will continue to do the will of Jesus. We understand that we serve a whole God, and just as he has called men, so has he called us women.

We will not quiver, we will not plunder, we will no longer allow the voice of patriarchy to keep us from what we know is our bounded duty to serve God in different capacities. We now are aware that we are the chief cornerstone of our families, communities, and churches. Therefore, we will not back up and we will not quit. We are women called by God who have been affirmed and encouraged by the Word of God. Women might be rejected by men but are accepted by God. In the New Testament, Luke noted that it was a woman, (a sinner), who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Jesus commended her for doing such a thing as he told Simon, he had judged wrongly.

A certain creditor had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman: I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment (Lk. 7:41-47).

Simon was judging her on two counts being a sinner and her gender of being a woman. Yet, Jesus looked beyond her sin and gender and recognized her as a created being. As women, we are rejected for being women, despite our giftings and the anointing of God on our lives. We are being judged wrongly, simply because of our gender. The Bible

reminds us that man looks at the outside, but God looks at the heart (1 Sm. 16:7). God looks beyond our faults and sees our need, the need to be accepted for who we are, the need to be supported, the need to be encouraged, and the need to be affirmed, by both the men and women with whom we are in ministry with.

When God looks upon his sons and daughters, he sees us as his creation and has chosen to anoint and call us to go forth and preach his word in season and out of season. I am grateful for the women in my life who were a source of support and encouragement as I walked this journey. I am reminded daily that I am a cornerstone; a cornerstone that was once rejected, but now stands tall. I stand as one who is willing to tell my story. Telling of my story as Reverend Lee did, I believe will help to deliver some young woman into walking into the plan of God for her life. Therefore, the next chapter will engage a historical figure, Reverend Lee, who experienced rejection by men but ultimately became a cornerstone that continues to inspire women called to ministry today.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The spirit of rejection is very real and exists even within the walls of the church. To be rejected is defined as: to be cast off, to be dismissed, or refused of your proposal or idea.<sup>1</sup> As a people, African Americans has experienced rejection in so many ways and in so many instances. Likewise, women and even more so African American women also have experienced rejection both in the church and in society. The one place where most would believe and feel that everyone should accept them for who they are as well as what God called them to do and be is the church; yet women especially those in ministry found that even in the church rejection is very real.

Persons are taught that the Word of God is real, powerful, and truthful; it is applicable to all as it clearly states that “God is no respecter of persons.” So, if God has called and calls men to preach and declare God’s word, can God not also call women to do likewise? Joel 2:28 states: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Jl. 2:28 NRSV). Throughout, scripture reveals how God used women to spread God’s word. Women were at the empty tomb of

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<sup>1</sup> George Matthew, *King James Biblical Dictionary*, s.v. “King James Bible Online,” <https://www.kingjamesbibledictionary.com>.

Jesus at the resurrection and were given the opportunity to spread the word that Jesus rose from the dead (Lk. 24:1-10 NRSV). It was a woman who was chosen to birth the Messiah, the King of Kings. It was a woman who prepared Jesus' body for his burial as she anointed his body with expensive perfume. It was a woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Women although portrait to be second class citizens within the scripture, scripture also showed how women were very instrumental in the life of Jesus Christ.

Within this patriarchal misogyny society, the voices of women are still being silenced. Several women in ministry experience the spirit of rejection in very subtle ways, while others experience of rejection is outright visible. Some women in ministry are not affirmed, encouraged, and supported, which can negatively impact their self-esteem, thus limiting their ability to move into various positions in their denominations. Women still experience rejection when they express their call to ministry and fail to receive encouragement to pursue higher levels of ministry. Being the president of the Missionary Society, the choir or other lay ministries within the church is acceptable for women, but once they express their call to ministry, many are discouraged and are questioned if they are sure, it is the call to ordination which may lead to pastoring, or some are encouraged to follow the route of evangelism or becoming a missionary.

For this historical foundation chapter, one woman who experienced such rejection within the church is Reverend Jarena Lee. The life and experience of Jarena Lee is to remind us of the struggle that women encounter in ministry and experience within the workplace outside of the church. Jarena Lee knew firsthand how it felt to be rejected simply for being a woman who was called to ministry for doing and pursuing what God

has called her to do. She was born on February 11, 1783, at Cape May, in the state of New Jersey. At an incredibly young age of seven, she was separated from her parents and went to live as a servant maid to a man by the name of Mr. Sharp, who resided about sixty miles from where she was born.<sup>2</sup> Jarena's parents were ignorant of the knowledge of God and could not instruct her in the things of God.

An early encounter that Jarena had was as she traveled with others to hear a Presbyterian missionary preacher. Although very few persons were present, the preacher was solemn, and she recognized that he was serious about his master's business. She stated that at the reading of the Psalm, a ray of conviction darted into her soul. These were the words, of the first verse of the Psalm for the service: "Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin, born unholy and unclean, sprung from man, whose guilty fall, corrupts the race and taints us all."<sup>3</sup>

Another initial encounter with God at a young age was when she lied about doing something that she knew that she failed to do. She stated, "The Spirit of God moved in power through her conscious and told her "I was a wretched sinner."<sup>4</sup> Although her mother failed to teach her the things of God, Jarena learned and became familiar with the voice and move of the Spirit of God within her. After that experience she vowed never to tell another lie.

Even after this experience, Jarena reported in her autobiography that the Spirit of the Lord never entirely forsook her, but that it continually and mercifully strived with her

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<sup>2</sup> Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Lee: Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Pantianos Classics, 1936), iv.

<sup>3</sup> L. William Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Lee*, iv.

until the Spirit's gracious power converted her soul.<sup>5</sup> Jarena attended several services where she learned and grew to know God. All this exposure developed into a hunger to get to know God. While still living as a servant maid, and being convicted of the Spirit of the Lord, Jarena reported that she had times that her sinful nature tempted her to take her life. On one occasion, she went to a brook and as she sat down Satan convinced her to take her life. However, shortly after, the thought left her, and she knew that it was the hand of God again that intervened to save her life.

Jarena sought to find the God that Moses and the prophets wrote about, but there was no one to instruct her in the things of God. She later moved and lived with a Roman Catholic family, but the Spirit of God gave her no rest. The family attempted to change her desire by taking her Bible and giving her a novel to read in its place, but she failed to read the novel. Jarena desired to find and get to know this God. She later attended an African Methodist Episcopal church where Richard Allen preached. After a few weeks of attending this church, she concluded that this was where God wanted her to unite with the people, and a few weeks later, she gave her life fully to the Lord.

From a young age into her young adulthood, Jarena shared that she felt or experienced the hand of God on her life. She continued to pursue this, which was the call of God on her life. During this time, she endured several attempts by Satan to persuade her to take her life by drowning herself, but through it all the voice of God interceded causing her to abandon the act.

After setting herself apart and getting to know God more, she recalled one day hearing a voice telling her "Go preach the Gospel!" Her immediate response was that "no

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<sup>5</sup> Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Lee*, iv.

one would believe her.”<sup>6</sup> This voice spoke to her several times, but she refused as she read that Satan can be tricky to become an angel of light to cause deception. However, she knew what to do, and she immediately stole away to a secret place to seek the face of God. Again, she experienced the Spirit of God as the Spirit showed her a pulpit and a Bible. That night as she slept, she stated that she preached in her sleep and her excitement and exclamation of her preaching not only woke her from sleep but also the members of the household.<sup>7</sup> She then knew that she had to go forth and share this news with the minister of the church, that she attended; the minister was Rev. Richard Allen.

As she spoke with him, he questioned her regarding the sphere in which she thought of moving. He then also shared that prior to her, another woman named Ms. Cook had the same request. She was known to do good work in exhortation and having prayer meetings. The preacher in charge at the time gave Ms. Cook permission through a verbal license. Rev. Allen then told Jarena that according to the book of Discipline that governed the African Methodist Episcopal Church, failed to call for women preachers. Jarena saw this as her way out of not accepting her call to preach. That did not last long, as she knew that God called her to preach the gospel. She began to ask, “If the man preaches because the Savior died for him, why not the woman? Did He not die for the woman as well as the man? Is he not a whole God?”<sup>8</sup>

Eight years passed since Jarena sought permission to be licensed to preach. During this time, she was only allowed to exhort, which seldom took place. This call to

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<sup>6</sup> Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Lee*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Lee*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Lee*, 15.



preach the gospel burned within her and she felt the need to be obedient. However, since the Book of Discipline failed to document the option for women to preach, she was not given the opportunity and could not be licensed. She once again sought permission from Rev. Richard Allen who was now a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church and again was rejected by him. Jarena sought permission to exhort and hold prayer meeting in her own hired houses and to exhort if given the liberty. As she went forth, each time she held a prayer meeting, the house became full of those in attendance. She met resistance along the way by a male attendee who failed to truly believe in God and certainly failed to believe in a woman being the head.

This non-believer and chauvinist requested Jarena to come and pray for him. After some time, he eventually died. This assignment further confirmed Jarena's call to the preaching ministry as through this process she led him to Christ, and at the time of his death she knew that they would meet again on the "safe shores of salvation."<sup>9</sup> Shortly after this event, Jarena along with others was at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church when the Reverend Richard Williams was scheduled to preach. He mounted the pulpit, gave the song to sing, the scripture, and the subject. As he was about to preach, it appeared as if something was not right. Jarena immediately jumped up and proceeded to give an exhortation of the given text right on the spot. After this, she knew that she would be expelled, but instead the bishop stood to his feet and affirmed that she came to him eight years prior declaring her call to ministry. Jarena held several prayer meetings and preached all over wherever she was asked to do so.

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<sup>9</sup> Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Lee*, 23.

## Main Body

All through history, women have proven themselves, and oftentimes are still denied the opportunity to move in the areas in which God has called and gifted them to serve. Loren Cunningham and David Hamilton state that they envision seeing every little girl growing up knowing that she is valued, knowing that she is made in the image of God, and knowing that she can fulfil all the potential God has put within her.<sup>10</sup> Cunningham and Hamilton further discuss the leadership role of both men and women. They stated that they heard that leadership is male, however many males in leadership lack the qualities to be a good leader, and there are more women with these leadership skills. As Jarena stated earlier, “Did not Jesus die for the woman as well as the man?” Loren Cunningham and David Hamilton stated that if women are gifted in leadership, should she not be allowed to lead.<sup>11</sup> Is not God for both men and women in leadership? Did God only call men to preach the gospel?

Some women in ministry are still trying to find their places of acceptance or their places of belonging. The question remains if women should remain silent when Paul writes “Women should be silent in the church. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says” (1 Cor. 14:34 NRSV). If this was Paul’s thinking, then Paul contradicted his own teaching when he gave instructions about the women’s dress code while prophesying. There are those who desire for women to remain silent by not encouraging or supporting them. This causes them to develop a spirit of

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<sup>10</sup> Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton, *Why Not Women?: A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle, WA: Youth with a Mission Publishing, 2000), 13-14.

<sup>11</sup> Cunningham and Hamilton, *Why Not Women?*, 52.

inferiority, low self-esteem, and feelings of rejection. When these occurrences take place, some women then become silent by not accepting the will of God for their lives.

Jarena Lee's story reminds readers that although women may lack the encouragement and support, they must still persevere in pursuing the call of God on their lives. Historically, women in ministry were in a vexed situation. In some denominations, some form of struggle typified the ordinations of women, which culminated in the first ordinations of women during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Women were integral in the faith community of the church and since the election of God's people and have – in many and various ways – exercised leadership (ministry) despite suppression in a male-dominated patriarchal environment.<sup>13</sup>

The Pentecostal movement remains ambivalent to the role of women in ministry; the movement endorses male dominance and submission of women to men. They give a sense that men and women are equal because both can receive the Spirit, but women remain in the margins.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes women are affirmed and accepted because of the emancipatory role of the Spirit, but at other times they are marginalized through oppressive interpretative practices of the Bible. Although women are given voice, especially because of the belief within Pentecostal churches that the Holy Spirit speaks through men and women, the same voice is taken away when women are subordinated to the male power.<sup>15</sup> Although the Pentecostal movement moves towards a liberating space,

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<sup>12</sup> Graham A. Duncan, "South African Presbyterian Women in Leadership in Ministry (1973-2018)," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019): 1.

<sup>13</sup> Duncan, "South African Presbyterian Women," 1.

<sup>14</sup> Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Marginalization of Women," *Scriptura* 114 (2015): 1, <http://scriptura.journal.ac.za>.

<sup>15</sup> Gabaitse, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 1, <http://scriptura.journal.ac.za>.

within this movement an unresolved attitude towards women still exists. Rekopantswe Mate argues that Pentecostal churches fail to do much to destabilize or threaten patriarchy; rather advancing teachings that call for female submission and headship of the male reinforces patriarchy.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, patriarchy used scripture to keep women from accepting the will of God for their lives. Thus, some women are afraid or unsure of how to move forward in this patriarchal society. So many would rather just remain in their current space and not to move forward, and there are those who persist in following the call of God on their lives and continue to press towards the voice of God in their lives.

Roxane Mountford in her article “The Gendered Pulpit” notes how pulpits are designed for the male preacher rather than for the female preacher. The article points out the hierarchical relationship between the preacher and the audience, which encodes the speaker as the authority and the listeners as silent, passive recipients of “his wisdom.”<sup>17</sup> Mountford argues that this type of relationship is unappealing to women preachers who tend to prefer a populist stance and seek more intimate connection with the congregation. The article further states that the pulpit often casts women as misfits in that sacred space, and so to overcome this obstacle women often prefer to preach from the floor or outside of church entirely.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rekopantswe Mate, “Wombs as God’s Laboratories Pentecostal Discourses on Femininity in Zumba Laboratories. Pentecostal Discourse on Femininity in Zimbabwe,” *Africa Journal of the International African Institute* 72, no. 4 (2002): 566.

<sup>17</sup> Lindal Buchanan, “Review of Roxanne Mountford. *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*. Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms Series. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003,” *Rhetorica* 23, no. 4 (November 2005): 401, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rh.2005.23.4.401>.

<sup>18</sup> Buchanan, “Review of Roxanne Mountford,” 401.

Liz Schercliff reports that her sense of calling came from hearing a woman preach who was not ordained; she was a laywoman. What steered Liz's sense of her calling was the freshness and honesty about the preacher's faith. Liz discusses the struggle to preach with integrity and the struggle to move from the inherited pattern to one that more authentically represents her own female lived experience.<sup>19</sup>

From the study of Feminist Theology, the decade's feminist Christians heard the call of Divine Wisdom from the book of Proverbs. "*Wisdom has built Her house; she has set up Her seven pillars. She also has set Her table. She has sent out her ministers to call from the highest places in the town... 'Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight.'*" (Prv. 9:1-3, 5-6 NRSV). This Wisdom called women and men to gather around the world to envision and live the discipleship of equals to celebrate their baptismal call, and to share with each other their lived and variegated gifts.<sup>20</sup> Feminist scholarship also documents those women and men were apostles, missionaries, prophets, community leaders, and healers not only in early Christianity but also throughout church history.<sup>21</sup>

There is increasing unease among women and men who experience leadership in the church who remain stuck in a patriarchal mindset, thereby exercising power in an authoritarian, "from-above" manner.<sup>22</sup> The article "Women and Leadership from a Pastoral Perspective of Friendship" states that one of the effects of sexism on women is

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<sup>19</sup> Liz Schercliff, *Preaching Women: Gender, Power, and the Pulpit* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2019), 168.

<sup>20</sup> Mary E. Hunt and Diane L. Neu, *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2010), 1527.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt and Neu, *New Feminist Christianity*, 1527.

<sup>22</sup> J. Barr, "The Authority of the Bible," *Ecumenical Review* 21, no. 92 (1969): 150.

disempowerment. The author confirms that “Negative messages about womanhood have been internalized and external forces have kept women out of positions of power and authority. Women have not been socialized to be leaders. Natural leadership qualities in women have been suppressed by means of labels such as ‘unfeminine behavior.’”<sup>23</sup> The article continues,

The church has substantially contributed to the disempowerment and exclusion of women from positions of power and authority. To this day women are excluded from leadership positions in some churches and are rather sparsely represented in others. Nancy Ramsay (2000:276-277) refers to this as “ecclesial distortion of women of women’s experience of power” and describes the effect of these distortions: “Prevailing patriarchal definitions of power have led many women to believe they cannot and perhaps ought not exercise genuine agency. Having internalized a subordinated role early in life, many women cannot imagine it could be appropriate to act in their own interests or that power could be shared. Young women in particular might also think it is dangerous to exercise power, because to do so requires breaking connections and risks the possibly isolating consequences of voicing difference from those with whom they are connected. Ecclesial tradition complicates these fears by its implication in the subordination of women so that, for example, acting on one’s own interests could be defined as selfish or proud.” Women’s experience of power is rather complex on different levels (see Ramsay 2000:282). Intrapsychically women contend with different degrees of internalized subordination that is the result of being woman in a patriarchal culture. Professionally women in the church live and work in an environment that was and is complicit in their subordination. Women leaders in the church at the same time assume roles where they are seen as the representatives of God and exercise symbolic power.<sup>24</sup>

The history of women in ministry and leadership over the years have changed somewhat, however women continue to struggle. Jarena Lee showed that it is important for women to stand on the Word of God and to believe in themselves. Jarena Lee’s mother failed to teach Jarena the things of God, however, Jarena understood that God’s hands were upon her. She persevered, she walked miles and miles, conducted prayer meetings, and

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<sup>23</sup> Yolanda Dreyer, “Women and Leadership from a Pastoral Perspective of Friendship,” *HTS Theological Studies* 58, no. 1 (2002): 47.

<sup>24</sup> Dreyer, “Women and Leadership from a Pastoral Perspective of Friendship,” 47-48.

preached wherever and whenever she was given the opportunity. Persons within the African Methodist Episcopal church and beyond know and/or recognize Jarena Lee as the forerunner for women in ministry. Despite her being a trailblazer and being an example for all women across all denominations, several centuries later there was a debate and a struggle for her to be posthumously ordained.

I served as the New York Conference AME Women in Ministry Coordinator for eight years. In 2016 at the African Methodist Episcopal Church's Fiftieth Quadrennial session of the General Conference (200-year history) in Philadelphia – where it all started – I was blessed to be a part of the conversations surrounding the ordination of Jarena Lee. As I reflected on her story of speaking with the then Reverend Richard Allen about the call of God on her life; and his response was for her to go and speak with someone else because the Book of Discipline that governs African Methodist Episcopal churches failed to provide information about women preachers, I was in awe that here I am now decades later witnessing almost the same scenario of the debate of whether to ordain or not ordain her. July 2016, Jarena Lee was finally given the order of ordination.

On July 12, 2000, the AME Church elected and consecrated their very first female bishop—the Reverend. Vashti Murphy McKenzie. Since her election, the church only elected three other female bishops in the persons of Rev. Sarah Davis (now deceased), Rev. Carolyn Tyler Guidry (retired), and Rev. E. Anne Henning Byfield (active). As of the 2018-2019 report, there are over 4,514 women in ministry throughout their entire twenty African Methodist Episcopal Districts. The first female Presiding Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church was appointed in 1973, and since her appointment fifty-four other females were appointed to that office. As of the 2016 report,

there are forty-four active female Presiding Elders in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Listed in their 2016 report to the General Board, the Connectional African Methodist Episcopal Women in Ministry listed the following report from seventeen of its twenty Episcopal Districts:

- 65% of Episcopal District Finance Committees have no female clergy members.
- 88% of Annual Conference Trustee Boards are chaired by male clergy.
- 97% of Annual Conference Finance Committee are chaired by male clergy.
- 71% of Annual Conference Trustee Board have no female clergy members.
- 78% of Ministerial Efficiency Committees are chaired by male clergy.
- 87% of Annual Conference Board of Examiners are chaired by male clergy.
- 69% of Deans of the Annual Conference Ministerial Institute are male clergy.
- 76% of #1 churches in Presiding Elder Districts have male clergy.
- 83% of Chairs of the Committee on Ministerial orders are chaired by male clergy.

After all these many years and despite the tremendous changes that took place, women in ministry still fail to receive the support and/or encouragement, which can negatively impact their self-esteems and can in turn hinder their desires to pursue a higher calling within their denominations. Despite the lack of affirmation, encouragement and support that woman failed and or continue to fail to receive from our male colleagues, some women have learned to be supportive of each other. Jarena Lee had the benefit of a good sister friend who traveled with her.

### **Conclusions**

Hear now these words: “And it shall come to pass...that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy” (Jl. 2:28 NRSV). Part of the biblical foundation for this project reads “The stone that the builders rejected shall become the chief cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22 NRSV).



Controversy continues in the various branches of the church over the role of women in church life. The issues of women being “silent” and not “usurping authority” over men still cause much debate.<sup>25</sup> Although there are those who allow or permit some ministry for women, there are still some denominations that are still dealing with the issue of, should they ordain women and should they allow women into leadership roles.

Throughout history it is noted that those who desire to “silence” women in the church and prohibit them from participating in leadership roles often used Paul’s writings to defend their position. We also know that after studying Paul’s letters, we know that it has been misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misused by so many in an attempt to keep women out of leadership roles. Despite this attempt, more and more women and younger women are defying the odds, and answering the call to ministry

As the coordinator for the New York Annual Conference for African Methodist Episcopal Women in Ministry for eight years, I was blessed and privileged to be present at the African Methodist Episcopal Church’s Fiftieth Quadrennial session of the General Conference where after intense discussions, the decision was made to ordain Jarena Lee posthumously. There were several misunderstandings (even amongst women) as to who supports who and why the decision to go forth with the ordination should or should not take place.

After many meetings, texting, and small group meetings, a recommendation was made, and it was announced publicly that Jarena Lee would be ordained posthumously. The roar from the women both in ministry and others was overwhelming. Tears of joy and tears of accomplishment flowed. Although there is still much more work to do in all

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<sup>25</sup> J. Kevin Conner, *The Ministry of Women Gender and Authority in the Church* (New Kingston, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 9.

denominations for women in ministry, this was a milestone for Jarena Lee after all these years – to receive recognition and acknowledgment of one called of God. No, she was not physically present, at her ordination, I believe most women felt her spirit's presence and rejoiced with and for her.

Jarena Lee is one whom “the builders” rejected. Those in charge, those who thought they had “the last say,” rejected her yet she became a cornerstone. As a result of her persistence, her determination, and her fight many women are now in ministry. In 1970, the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church voted to ordain women. In 1976, the Episcopalians followed. The general acceptance of women's ordination appeared to be a high point in a long history of expanding female leadership in American Protestant churches.<sup>26</sup> Many women lack support because a patriarchal society continues to dominate ministry. Yet many women continue the fight and have the determination to go forth in ministry despite the lack of affirmation and encouragement from their male counterparts and still some women.

Jarena paved the way for others to follow such as Reverend Vashti Murphy McKenzie who became the first elected and consecrated bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. More than 4,000 women are in ministry within the African Methodist Episcopal Church and so many others through other denominations. The Book of Discipline that Reverend Richard Allen used to hinder Jarena from being ordained, even after her ordination in 2016, the same book for that years' publication, still did not mention her name or her ordination. One wonders if this was a mere oversight or was it intentional?

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<sup>26</sup> Rosemary Reuther and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds., *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 364.

Women with callings to ministry emerged soon after the inception of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787. Richard Allen allowed Jarena Lee, the first preaching woman, to preach, and licensed her but refused to ordain her. Both women and men sought to persuade the church to recognize the call of women to the preaching ministry. In 1844, 1848, and 1856, petitions to the General Conference to license women were rejected, and in 1864, the General Conference let a resolution to license women die.<sup>27</sup>

As women continue this journey, they too must ask the same question as Jarena: “Did Jesus not die for women as he did for the men?” After all these years, the struggle continues. So many women are kept out of the major positions within the church, and in several denominations, women fail to pastor the lead churches. Women continue to be behind as they continue to be kept out of major positions.

Jarena Lee’s story also showed us that God calls both men and women, and when we work together for the up building of God’s Kingdom, much can be achieved. She documented the story of a colored man name William Scott who came to see her. He was a faithful follower of Jesus. He was one who visited the sick and he understood the great things belonging to a man of full stature in Christ Jesus. She continued to document her encounter with Mr. Scott who questioned her regarding her call. He inquired if the Lord had justified her soul, of which she answered yes, he followed up by asking if the Lord had sanctified her, and her response was no and went on to explain that she did not know what that meant. He then took on the task to instruct her further in the knowledge of the Lord respecting this blessing.

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<sup>27</sup> Christian Recorder, “The Ostrich Problem,” Women in Ministry, December 2020, 1.

He taught her about the conviction of sin, justification from sin and the entire sanctification of the soul to God. Jarena documented that this teaching was beautiful, and she immediately believed it. He then asked her to promise to pray for these things in her secret devotions. This teaching caused her to truly seek God while asking God to remove all those things out of her heart that were not of him. These secret devotional time with God praying as she was taught by Mr. Scott, revealed within her the root of pride, anger, and self-will with many evils.<sup>28</sup> This also shows that as men and women created by God, that we can and are called to support, encourage, and affirm each other. Her pastor (male) would not license her; however, another male, Mr. Scott, took the time to teach her what she needed to know to be drawn closer to God and to understand who she is in him. This man understood the assignment on Jarena's life.

Because of the voice of patriarchy over the years, many women in ministry are not ready or willing to accept a female as their pastor. They have been taught or reared in only seeing and acknowledging men in leadership positions within certain professions, and unfortunately in the church as well. Women are the pillars of the church from the pulpit to the door, yet the struggle continue for them to find acceptance in the place where both male and female declare the, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners" (Is. 61:1 NRSV).

Over the last 200 years since the licensing of Jarena Lee in 1819, until the election of the first woman being elected Bishop in 2000, many has worked hard to help move

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<sup>28</sup> L. William Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 33-34.

women progressively forward. However, women still find themselves challenged by cultural expectations, oppressive systems, and discriminative policies and protocols that work to sustain a hierarchy that places men in key positions of leadership, influence, and power. This privilege, or more specifically it is male privilege.<sup>29</sup> But the Bible says, “Then afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy...” (Jl. 2:28 NRSV). Does that not include women? I am Jarena’s daughter. I am a product of the struggle that Jarena endured. Because of Jarena Lee, I am, and because I am, the next young woman behind me will be. Jarena Lee, the forerunner for women in ministry, continue to speak loudly especially in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She continues to remind us that we (women) are just as important and that despite the obstacles that we might encounter, to seek the heart of God. If God has justified us and sanctified us, and we have sought the forgiveness of Jesus Christ once those things within our hearts that are not of him are revealed, then we are to pursue the areas of ministry that we have been called to.

Jarena Lee has inspired so many women, and in the midst of being inspired, we must be reminded that each one teaches one and reaches one. As women in ministry, we must be inspired to rejoice when our sister is promoted, make room/space for our sister once we are invited into the room or at the table. It is important to build relationship with our male colleagues, which will help them in better understanding that God has called women as he has called men and that he died for us, just as he has died for them as well. As we who are now ordained, educated and have been given the opportunity to be in leadership, Jarena’s story tells us that we must not give up, we must continue to strive to

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<sup>29</sup> Erika D. Crawford, “Understanding Privilege,” Christian Recorder, July 2017, <https://www.thechristianrecorder.com>.

be all that we can be, and we must pave the way for the next generation. Jarena Lee opened the door, it is up to us to walk through it, and to keep the door open. Not only must we walk through and keep the door open, but we must also invite other women to come through the door, we must work together as brothers and sisters in Christ for the up building of God's kingdom. The next chapter will introduce the theological foundation in support of the hypothesis theologically.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

We are living in a polarized time where the rejection of others seems to become the norm. We are separated by racism, sexism, classism, economic status, denominations, and titles, just to name a few. Sadly, the church has also taken on the characteristics of the world within its structure by allowing separatism to take place within its structure/system. Perhaps this is the reason, why the New Testament writer, the Apostle Paul admonished the church to be unified. Throughout several of his writings, Paul admonishes the believers of Jesus Christ (the body of Christ, the church) in his writings about maintaining the unity of the body (church). For example, in his letter to the Corinthians he writes, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement (1 Cor. 1:10).

In this letter, Paul admonishes this church in Corinth, as it also speaks to us, that there is to be no divisions amongst us. Instead, we are to be joined together in the same mind and judgment. Yet, the church of today consist of division amongst itself. First, we are divided by denominations, we are divided by sexism, and we are divided by gender roles for leadership. Although women are the majority in most churches across denominational line, they are left out of major roles within their denominations, while men although less qualified, oftentimes, are nominated, elected, and appointed to

leadership roles. The division in the church continue as women also do not receive the support, affirmation, and or encouragement needed in pursuing these positions. They are usually appointed to the lesser charges (smaller congregations).

In his letter to the church, Paul goes on to remind us in this letter to the Philippians:

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then many my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being One in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:1-5)

Here, we find where Paul is trying to galvanize the church to be on one accord, mind, heart, and spirit by having a vision of unity within the church at Philippi. The same is required of the church of today. Yet, we have forgotten the words spoken by Paul, for us to have the same mindset of Jesus Christ. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, calls for unity within the church and for us to be as one, yet despite the admonishment to bring about unity in the church, separatism continue to this day.

Despite Paul's admonishment written in the New Testament, it is noted throughout the scriptures how separatism has caused women throughout biblical times, (Old Testament) to feel rejected and left out. These feelings of rejection continue to date. Despite the spirit of rejection, as women, we understand that we are the backbone of the church, our families, and our communities. As a child growing up on the island of Jamaica, while being reared by my aunt, although we were poor, I was not privileged to have the better things in life as my friends. However, I had love. I had a home where I was loved and appreciated. I was raised in the church and was loved by the members



there. I was raised in a Seventh-Day Adventist home. Those who were considered better than me because their families had things (material) did not attend any church, so on Sunday's, I would gather them together and teach them what I learned in Sabbath School on Saturday's. During those times, they saw me as their equals, instead of their usual way of making me feel less than them. As children, we learn from adults and know how to inflict pain on each other. Unfortunately, as some of us grow older, we carry those same emotions. Either we allow others to make us feel less than, or we do the opposite, because of our skin color, financial status, or gender, we treat others as if they are less than.

Jarena Lee is one who is also able to relate to this experience of rejection. When she came forth and explained to her pastor that she knows that the Lord called her to ministry, she was turned away. She was not encouraged or affirmed. Yet, she did not allow this rejection to hinder her from following the call of God on her life. After being turned away from her pastor, after being told that within their *Book of Discipline*, it does not provide information about women being ordained. She did not allow the discouragement to stop her; instead, she walked for hours and for over two hundred miles preaching and teaching the Word of God. Jarena Lee was posthumously ordained in 2016 at the gathering of the Fiftieth Quadrennial General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The same church that refused to affirm her calling over two hundred years before.

Jarena Lee's calling was not affirmed until, after the opportunity was provided for her after the preacher of the church was not able to finish his sermon. Ms. Lee was prompted to get up and preach. After her preaching, her then Pastor, Richard Allen

acknowledges her calling and made it known that she had come to him prior to make the request of the call on her life. Jarena Lee became the cornerstone for women who are in ministry today. She is the forerunner for women who are pursuing ministry. She was the stone that was rejected but has become the cornerstone.

This chapter will explore how Womanist Theology has played an essential role in helping women feel affirmed by the God that has called them. The voice of theologian, Reverend Doctor Jacqueline Grant and other voices will be heard in the writing of this chapter including myself. Womanist Theology was born out of a radical and vital move on the part of African American Christian women to define and affirm themselves within the context of their own history and society.<sup>1</sup> Womanist Theology was in response to Black Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology. Both theologies found to be guilty of the same acts of demoralizing the totality of women's oppression and Black people's marginalization, those theologians proved to be guilty of the same dominant patriarchal acts that they accuse the White male-dominant systems of perpetrating against women and African Americans.

Feminist Theology spoke to the oppression that Black women experience in the patriarchy of the church and society, but Feminist Theology was insensitive to Black women's experience with racism. Likewise, Black theologians addressed Black women's issues of racism but refused to acknowledge its own sexist articulation and actions.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in their determination and desire to be affirmed and heard in the sound of their own diverse and multi-dimensional voices, African American women were forced to break

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine McCollins Flake, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Hurting Women* (Jamaica, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 60.

<sup>2</sup> Flake, *God in Her Midst*, 60.

from the feminist and Black liberation traditions. Black women gave birth to their own, “Womanist Theology.”<sup>3</sup>

Womanist Theology is about and for Black women.<sup>4</sup> Womanist Theology attempts to help Black women see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community. Womanist Theology challenges all oppressive forces impeding Black women’s struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life is conducive to freedom and well-being for their families. Womanist Theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical disability, and caste.<sup>5</sup>

At some point between the 1960’s and 1970’s, Liberation Theology emerged on the scene which opened the eyes of those who felt that they were under oppression. Those who felt that they were oppressed included African Americans, South Africans, Latin Americans, and Asians. Their eyes became opened as they began to realize the need to be free from the White male dominant society. Although the work of White women who unashamedly clung to a racist perspective that had spurned and oppressed women of color, they failed to fully understand the plight of Black women.<sup>6</sup> Womanist Theology was birth out of a Black woman having a desire to address their tri-dimensional

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<sup>3</sup> Flake, *God in Her Midst*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*, 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> Flake, *God in Her Midst*, 61-62.

oppression which was their own theological perspective.<sup>7</sup> Separatism again found itself amongst the women.

This chapter will also explore the voices of several theologians who understood the words of Paul to the church being united. In this writing, we will hear the voices of those theologians (especially) women who understood that as women, especially Black women, we must support, encourage, and affirm each other. We must provide opportunities for each other to progress on this journey. Women experienced separatism simply because of the color of their skin, or because of their gender.

Dr. Grant explained the limitations of Feminist Theology, as being inadequate as it is both White and racist. She explained that Feminist Theology is White in relation to the development of their theological perspectives. As White women they are still “White” and are able to obtain the freedom and privilege of “White privilege.” The Black woman’s experience as compared to their White counterpart during and after slavery are very different and these differences are still active today. Dr. Grant also stated that Black women, as part of the servicing class, were not awarded the protection of White patriarchy during slavery.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Grant further states that a womanist is then a strong Black woman who has sometimes been mislabeled as a domineering castrating matriarch. A womanist is one who has developed survival strategies despite the oppression of her race and sex in order to save her family and her people.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Flake, *God in Her Midst*, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 196.

<sup>9</sup> Grant, *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus*, 205.

Alice Walker defines a womanist as “Black feminist or a female of color.” She further states that womanist theologians have a long history in the lives of African American women active in church and culture.<sup>10</sup> Womanist Theology is a signification for a theology that permits African American women to define themselves, to embrace and consciously affirm their cultural and religious traditions, and their own embodiment.<sup>11</sup>

In the preface of *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* written by Jacqueline Grant, she stated that “feminist theologians have uncovered a direct relationship between exclusive male imagery of God and the structural oppression of women.”<sup>12</sup> Feminist theologians were faced with the dilemma of the issue of understanding that Jesus who is, no doubt, male; and he was, no doubt, the head of the Christian church. Feminist theologians were faced in explaining this male dominant leader for women, who were experiencing separatism, exclusion, and rejection from male leaders. How does one explain the love of Christ, the God-bearer, being fully man to women who sees and hear of the man being the head of the church, being the head of the family and community, yet they do not see and feel this support, the affirmation, or the encouragement from the head of the church in the men who are physically present to lead them?

Theologian Grant goes on to say that when introduced to Christological issues from the feminist perspective, she understood, but it was not until her adulthood that she

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<sup>10</sup> David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 398.

<sup>11</sup> Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 540.

<sup>12</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, xxi.

began to recognize the sexual politics in theology, and in a patriarchal society. She also stated that she began to see the racial politics in theology in a racist society.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Grant had some issues at first in relating the feminist theologians as she was brought up in a home where Jesus was common to them. She grew up in a home of ministers on both sides, paternal and maternal, and witnessed the love of Jesus. Dr. Grant was not familiar with the separatism, the exclusion, the rejection of this male dominating patriarchal society who profess Christ but practiced separatism, discouragement, and rejection of women. In her home, she heard and was taught the love of Jesus.

I can relate to Dr. Grant's report of knowing the love of Jesus. Raised in a home where the word of God was taught, and the love of Jesus was not only taught, but expressed, I too was not a witness to the separatism, sexism, and racial discrimination, especially in the church. I was raised in Jamaica, West Indies, so within my community, I never experienced any forms of rejection based on my gender or skin color. However, after arriving in the United States, and moving into adulthood, I became familiar with the various forms of discrimination, sexism, racism, and classism. I was certainly exposed to rejection within the context of the church, where God (male) is the head, these same acts of rejection was not expected.

Donald Musser and Joseph Price stated that Womanist Theology agrees with Black Theology in its critique of White racism and the need for Black unity. It also agrees with Feminist Theology in its criticism of sexism and the need for the unity of women. Womanist Theology attempts to move beyond the difference/the critique of the

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<sup>13</sup> Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, xxi.

racism in Feminist Theology and sexism in Black Theology.<sup>14</sup> Womanist Theology helped us to realize that there is and was a need for women to be united. The voice of misogamy and patriarchy continue to rule. If they are finding reasons, knowing and unknowing, to separate us and to hinder us for holding leadership positions, then as women, we must unite, join, and make room for each other.

James Cone in *The Cross and The Lynching Tree* stated Blacks were unable to embrace the cross, without experiencing the profound contradictions that slavery, segregation, and lynching posed for their faith.<sup>15</sup> He went on to say because of their inability to embrace the cross, was the reason why Blacks left White churches during slavery to form their own places of worship. This action cause Black people to find their own space for free religious and political expressions, but it did not remove the need to wrestle with God.<sup>16</sup>

Some African American women can relate to James Cone's writing, as they too have experienced the correlation between the cross and the lynching tree. The cross which speaks of Jesus and his love, and the lynching tree where Blacks were hung (lynched). Feminist Theology related to them being superior to African American women, thus, Womanist Theology was formed. Yet, Delores S. Williams in *Sisters in the Wilderness* tells us that womanist theologians, especially those who take their slave heritage seriously, are led to question James Cone's assumption that the African

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<sup>14</sup> Musser and Price, *New and Enlarged HandBook*, 549.

<sup>15</sup> James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 26-27.

<sup>16</sup> Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 27.

American theologians can make paradigmatic use of the Hebrew's exodus and election experience as recorded in the Bible.<sup>17</sup>

Delores Williams supports my hypothesis that if women (especially women in ministry) are supported, encouraged, and affirmed (know who they really are) then they will be able to pursue higher positions within their denominations. Ms. Williams stated that because her female identity was firmly fixed within her biblical paradigms supporting an androcentric bias in their theological statements, and how it had used the Bible differently. Her confidence was built up as a woman and as an African American woman as she re-read Hagar's story, she began to see the similarity between Hagar's story and her own. Like Hagar, who was African, she was a slave, and she was brutalized by her slave owners, Delores Williams mirrored herself to these same descriptions, of African descent. Her fore parents were slaves; and as a Black female also experienced being brutalized.

Bishop Vashti McKenzie (first elected and consecrated female Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church) in her book *Not Without a Struggle* quoted Dr. Cain Felder in saying "that on the challenges that is facing us today is to search for more adequate modes of hermeneutics to demonstrate that the Bible is relevant to Blacks and other Third World people, who are locked into the socioreligious framework of the Greco-Roman world."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 130.

<sup>18</sup> Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1996), 55.



The lack of female leadership goes as far back as to Old Testament times. The roles of women were in relationship to their husbands, sons, or fathers. Women were looked upon as possessions of the men in their lives. In the Bible, if the woman was raped, it was not viewed as a violent act that was committed against her, but to the man to whom she belonged (Jdg. 19-20). Women lacked the identification of leadership, yet they were very pivotal in achieving change within the Bible and even in today's society. Within the Bible, women such as the midwives who were very instrumental in saving Moses' life. His sister Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter and other women all played a role in keeping him alive for the future plans of God upon his life which was to bring about liberation for the people of Israel.

The women had leadership roles, yet they are not recognized or acknowledged for their roles. Deborah in Judges chapters four and five had the authority by title, office, and function. She was identified as wife, judge, prophetess and Mother of Israel. Her appointment as Judge was a divine appointment, as it is stated that within the Bible that women were allowed to be judges and or prophets.<sup>19</sup> Within the New Testament, there are some evidence of female leadership roles such as Mary Magdalene, Salome, Elizabeth, and others who are nameless and others who heard Jesus' teachings and responded to his leadership. Yet although within his writings, although Paul wrote about the unification of the church, the body of Christ, his letters have been used to deny women access to leadership roles. Bishop Vashti stated that "New Testament women"

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<sup>19</sup> McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*, 57.

“were at the crux of birthing new churches. They opened their homes to prayer meetings and to house churches.”<sup>20</sup>

Bishop McKenzie’s *Not Without a Struggle* is cited in saying that the book could be cataloging female leadership in the biblical and historical perspectives.<sup>21</sup> My first theological teacher/instructor was her aunt who taught me about God, his love, mercy, and chastisement. Yet, the teachings learned did not include the leadership roles of women in the Bible. Bishop Vashti helped me to understand that it is more than just learning the leadership roles of women in the Bible, but it is on the reflection on female biblical leader images to see how these role models engaged in leadership.

Leadership is an important component of strong and competent ministry. However, from the African American perspective, leadership is not only necessary, but demanded. Within the African American tradition, as a leader of a congregation, one must be equipped with administrative tools of leadership to enable the flock to function efficiently and effectively on a variety of levels, within and without the walls.<sup>22</sup>

As women, these leadership roles require us to be doubled skilled and knowledgeable and often although the female possess these skills and talents, they are still left out of leadership roles. Bishop McKenzie stated that in the African American context, we are shaped by our own experiences with racism, sexism, oppression, and economic deprivation. She also stated that we must be willing to be leaders to others who have historically been victimized by institutional oppression and persistent racism.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*, 63.

As women seek leadership positions in the local church as well as on the various levels of leadership, we must understand the language that is spoken. We must be willing to learn and understand the language as well as the definition or understanding as to what is meant when the question is asked about leadership.

*Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm* by

Linda E. Thomas said it best when she penned:

Womanist Theology is an emergent voice of African American Christian women in the United States. ... Womanist Theology takes seriously the importance of understanding the “languages” of Black women. There are a variety of discourses deployed by African American women based on their social location within the Black community. ...this language of Black women is understood by Black women; it accentuates intra-group talk. It is a language of compassion, and yet it is so no-nonsense. The words and actions of this language oppose sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and abuse to any of God’s creation. It is a language that respects the natural environment in the fullness of creation.<sup>24</sup>

As a Black woman what does it mean to be in leadership? What does it mean for me as an African American woman in ministry to be invited to the table, to be included in the number of those patriarchal settings? When will they begin to use inclusive language such as: us, and we? Instead of man, brothers, and gentlemen. Will we be regarded as someone who is capable of good leadership and can bring others together for the accomplishment of a common goal? The word leadership is a word with several different meanings. It is used to refer to those who occupy the role of a leader as well as to the special traits of those leader.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Linda E. Thomas, “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm,” *CrossCurrents* 48, no. 4 (1998): 488–499, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24461012>.

<sup>25</sup> McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*, 64.

Womanist Theology relies on the Bible as a principal resource because of its vision and promise of a world where the humanity of everyone will be fully valued.<sup>26</sup> As stated in Psalms 118:22, “The stone that the builders rejected Shall become the chief cornerstone.” The language used did not state: The male, or the White male that the builders (bishops, executives) rejected shall become the chief (pastor of larger congregations, members of steward of trustee boards on conference levels) cornerstone, just “the stone.” Women are often overlooked as there is a sense that women are not capable of leadership.

As stated, before the scripture clearly shows that the one (the stone) that has been rejected, will become the chief cornerstone (most willing, most dependable, capable, prominent, and faithful), just to name a few adjectives. Women, especially Black women, are the backbone of most churches. Women are more than 95% of most churches. Women are the ones who are dependable to be present for the various programs within the church. Women are the ones taking care of the children, teaching Sunday school, leading the choirs and overseeing most programs. However, when it comes to the major organizations such as in my context, women are often overlooked from heading that ministry or at times being considered a part of that ministry.

Delores Williams penned it this way,

When Black women accept the realization that far too many Black men and White men in power agree on the subordination of Black women, perhaps they will begin a serious women’s movement within the denominational churches, a movement to free women’s minds and lives of the androcentric indoctrination and the exploitative emotional commitments that cause many women to be tools of their own oppression and that of other women.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Musser and Price, *New and Enlarged Handbook*, 541.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 19.

As a woman, we need to know that we are making up more than 50% of the graduation class on college campuses, and as Black women more and more of us are earning degrees beyond the baccalaureate. Paula Giddings quoted a study by Jeanne Noble which continue to report that between 1942-1952 more Black women than White women were attending college. The rate was higher than that of White women or Black men.<sup>28</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have learned a lot about myself; Womanist Theology; being a Black woman in ministry both inside and outside of my denomination; through this chapter and my project thus far. As a Black woman in America, not only have we learned to deal with the rejection as women from the dominant culture of White men and women both in and outside of the church, but we must also deal with it from Black men. After all, why should we experience this separation from Black men who has also experienced racism, who also experienced rejection not only for the color of his skin, but at times because of his physical stature, and his knowledge? One would believe that as a Black man, he would join with Black women in seeking my rightful place, if qualified.

Womanist Theology has helped me to re-read Hagar's story and to see the comparison of her story in relationship to my own. Womanist Theology has taught me as a Black woman, I bring a lot to the table and I must own my sex, race, educational level, skin color and know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. It has taught me that I might be one of the stones that has been rejected by the builders, but I can rest assured that I am and will become a cornerstone. For so long women had to remain on the back

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<sup>28</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and When I Enter: The Impact of Women on Race and Sex* (New York, NY: Quill William Morrow, 1984), 244-245.

burner as it relates to their talents and gifts. Only being acknowledge and or recognized by the men in their lives. As women are becoming more educated, and walking in our God given callings, gifts and talents, women are beginning to make their voices heard, claiming their seat at the table. If space is not made possible, more women are bringing their own chair and making room for themselves and other women. Such as what these other women such as Alice Walker, Delores Williams, Elaine Fake, and Renita Weems has done for us.

I believe that as more and more women are affirmed and encouraged through various workshops such as self-esteem building, affirmations etc., will help to build their confidence and increase their self-esteem to pursue leadership roles. Building their confidence will be built up. Although we are more educated, and more of us are pursuing higher education, if we are not confident in ourselves, when we are overlooked, left out and may not be acknowledged by our counterparts, we will not give up. We will still be able to fight for not only ourselves, but the sister beside us or for the sister that is coming behind us.

Within my context, year after year, the larger congregations are assigned to our male counterparts; several women wait to be nominated and or elected to some ministries/committee which are considered to be of status. Over the years, things have changed tremendously. However, there is still so much more work to be done. My context consists of more females being ordained yearly; and more and more are obtaining higher levels of degrees. More women than men in my context are in the process of obtaining their doctoral degrees. Yet, more men than women are in leading congregations.

Delores Williams challenged Feminist Theology definition of patriarchy which name men as the sole oppressors of Black women. Ms. Williams claims that the experience of Black females is misrepresented when their oppression is expressed in terms of a language that only identifies men as oppressors of women.<sup>29</sup> I have learned that oppression is not only by White males, females, or even Black men. We must admit that this spirit of rejection against women, especially within ministry, is systemic. As women, we also tend to judge, critique, and compete, thus only looking out for ourselves.

My goal as I continue with this project is to continue to provide support, affirmation, validation, and encouragement to another sister especially those in ministry. To begin the process starting with young girls. I truly believe that if little girl's self-esteem and confidence is built up, with an understanding that she can make good judgement and decision, then she "can do all things through Christ who strengthens her" (Phil. 4:13), there is nothing that she cannot accomplish despite the rejection that she may encounter.

I can recall being at a church's Easter program rehearsal for the children. Two children, a male and female were given the same readings. They both did very well during rehearsal. Both children spoke with confidence and were very articulate. Their church schoolteacher and male pastor were proud of what they heard and saw during their rehearsal. On Easter Sunday morning, the young boy was dressed in his suit with a bowtie looking very mature. The young girl arrived in her pretty dress and was looking very beautiful. Both did a great job as they had done the day before.

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<sup>29</sup> Delores S. Williams, "The Color of Feminism: Or Speaking the Black Woman's Tongue," *Journal of Religious Thought* 43, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1986): 50.

At the end of their program on Easter, everyone, including the pastor, the older women, teachers, and parents commented on the children's presentations. However, everyone went to the young boy and stated that he was a born leader. They further indicated that he was going to be a pastor. He spoke as a pastor and that he was going to be a great leader and person. I watched as the little girl was comforted by her family, who joined with the others in telling her that she was good, and their comments to her were that she was going to be great missionary, others said that she was going to be an Evangelist someday. Although she was encouraged and affirmed stating that she too had done a great job, no one spoke into her life, by affirming that she too will be a great leader and possibly a pastor. Those words of encouragement, those words of affirmation to the young girl were not spoken to her. Words that told her that she was leadership material, words that may cause her just like the young boy to listen for God's voice, of calling her to the role of a pastor one day or a leader. As I reflected on that moment, I can now see that there were not many role models around for her as well. For little girls to see themselves in leadership roles, they need to have role models to emulate. There were no female clergy in this congregation which might have been the reason why those words were not spoken to her. However, maybe, she will be the first.

Prathia Hall I am sure would be able to identify with the young girl at that Easter program. Ms. Hall resisted her call to ministry until as she confided in a colleague that the voice of God was so loud that she could not ignore it any longer, she had to preach or die. As a Baptist female in ministry, she understood the challenges. Her first time before leadership, she was approved; however, several men were not present. At her second presentation, it was a tie as to whether she would go forth or not. She understood that if



God was not truly calling her that she would quit. She also was able to identify that she knew that her struggle was because of her gender. It is reported that her comments were that if she had been born a man, she would not have any challenges.

Like Jarena Lee, Prathia Hall had to deal with the struggles of being called by God to preach his word yet denied the opportunity because she/they were women. Prathia Hall stated the follow: “A preacher I am, a brother I am not.”<sup>30</sup> She chose to resolve the conflict by standing. Prathia realized that when she stood, she stood in who she was a woman. She stood in her full authentic being – Black, preacher, Baptist, and a woman. As like Jarena Lee, Prathia acknowledge that the God who made her a preacher was the same God who made her a woman. Jarena Lee’s comment was that it was the same God who called men to ministry as he called women to ministry.

This young girl, although she did not have the language or the know-it-all to understand what was occurring around her, probably would have stated the same as both Jarena Lee and Prathia Hall. The same God who spoke through my friend, is the same God who also spoke through me.

Role models are important in the life of children both girls and boys, which will help them in achieving higher positions/roles. We must be able to see other women in leadership positions, achieving what we are dreaming of, and being that which our hearts desire. As women, we must continue to do the work. We must encourage each other, support, and affirm each other. We must build up each other’s self-esteem and confidence

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<sup>30</sup> Courtney Pace, *Freedom Faith: The Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 44, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2232527>.

then we will begin to see more women positioning themselves for leadership roles. We must reach back and grab another sister along the way. So, as I rise, so does my sister.

As women in ministry, we have come a long way. In my context more females are being appointed to various leadership roles, and since the election and consecration of our first female Bishop in the person of Bishop Vashti McKenzie, several other women are answering the call to the Episcopacy. Several women are beginning to imagine and pursuing leadership roles. However, statistically, we are still the minority. We are still being kept out despite our desire to make it to the table.

We are learning to move out of our comfort zone, making it known to others that we are interested in certain leadership positions, and we are continuing to do the work that our souls must have. We are continuing to share with each other of our desire for certain positions and not only sharing with each other, but also with our male colleagues. As African American women, womanist theologians, we are reaching back and helping our younger sisters in the struggle. We are paving the way so that they may not have to have the same struggles that we had to endure. The next chapter will provide the interdisciplinary foundation supporting the hypothesis from a psychological perspective.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

For years while growing up, I have heard the phrase “the church is a hospital; a place where you can and will find healing for your wounds.” As a child, or even a pre-teen, I always wondered who the doctors, nurses, etc. were. Where was the medical team? Where did they lay those who were sick? If the church was a hospital, then why did the same people keep coming back? What no one explained was that the church was a place where the wounded healers gathered in an attempt to be healed. Joe Colletti, PhD stated that Henri Nouwen describes wounded healers as individuals who “must look after their own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.”<sup>1</sup> So, are those in the church wounded and available to heal those who come and need to be healed from their wounds? What they do not teach within the church is that we are all wounded healers. However, if I am the leader, how can I admit that I have been wounded? Are we in the church willing to admit that we too are wounded? That we have been hurt and or rejected? Are we willing to be transparent, to be authentic and to share our true feelings? Are we as a church, as church leaders there yet?

Rejection is a wound that runs deep. It is one of the most painful and damaging feelings that can ever happen to anyone, and this wound of rejection can take place even

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<sup>1</sup> Henri J. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, NY: Image Book, 1979), 1.

in the church. As per the *New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words*, the word “rejected” means disappear, failing the test, worthless.<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen further reports that we are all wounded people, whether it takes place physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. These wounds can be described as feeling alienated, isolated, lonely, rejected, and left in a place of isolation. *Merriam Webster's Dictionary* describes the word “feelings” as an emotional state or reaction.<sup>3</sup>

As I grew older, I realized that the church is not necessarily the place where we all are healed. Many of us experience our wounds within the walls of the church or from others who are of the church. Psychologically, when these wounds occur within the place where healing is expected, it can leave a lasting imprint within us. The wound of feeling rejected can leave us feeling disconnected, dissociated, misunderstood, and hurt. Other feelings may arise such as insecurity, inferiority, and leave us with low self-esteem.

Within this interdisciplinary chapter, I will explore voices from the discipline of Psychology through the Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPART) as well as some dynamics of psychiatrist Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory that are evident in this context. Within this context, some women who are in ministry or are contemplating accepting their call to ministry continue to view the dynamics and authority of patriarchy within the church. The church is family, the body of Christ where those of us in ministry tend to spend much of our time. Both Bowen's Family System Theory and IPART can or may reveal psychologically the wounds that some women have or will experience, thus leaving them feeling isolated or rejected.

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<sup>2</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 212.

<sup>3</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, s.v. “feelings,” <https://merriamwebster.com>.

IPART is an evidence-based theory of socialization and lifespan development that aims to predict and explain major consequences and other correlates of interpersonal acceptance and rejection worldwide.<sup>4</sup> This theory looked mainly at the effects of perceived parental acceptance-rejection in childhood and extending into adulthood.<sup>5</sup> As it broadened, it began to include intimate adult relationships and other significant interpersonal relationships throughout the lifespan. This shift took place in 2004 along with the transition of the theory and name from Parental Acceptance-Rejection theory (PARTheory) to its current designation, Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory).<sup>6</sup> IPART is divided into three sub-theories: Personality Sub-Theory, Coping Sub-Theory, and Sociocultural Sub-Theory.

Personality Sub-Theory deals with sociocultural, racial or gender groups, genders, and the like – tend to respond in the same way when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by their parents and other attachment figures? Parents are generally major attachment figures for children and parents tend to be uniquely important because the security and other emotional psychological states of offspring are dependent on the quality of relationships with their parents. Secondly, to what degree do the effects of childhood acceptance and rejection extend into adulthood and old age? This sub-theory begins with the assumption that over the course of bio-cultural evolution, humans have developed the enduring, biologically based emotional need for positive responses from the people most important to them.<sup>7</sup>

Coping Sub-Theory asks one question: what gives some children and adults the resilience to emotionally cope more effectively than most people with the experience of childhood rejection? To better understand the coping process, the

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<sup>4</sup> R. P. Rohner, *The Warmth Dimension: Foundations of Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986), 1.

<sup>5</sup> R. P. Rohner, *Child Acceptance-Rejection and Modal Personality in Three Pacific Societies* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> R. P. Rohner, “Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory Gets a New Name” (paper presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection, Madrid, Spain, June 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Ronald P. Rohner and Jennifer E. Lansford, “Deep Structure of the Human Affectional System: Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory,” *Journal of Family Theory and Review University of Connecticut* 10, no. 9 (2017): 428.

multivariate model of the behavior employed in IPARTheory states that whether an individual copes well with perceived rejection depends on factors related to the self, other, and context.<sup>8</sup>

Sociocultural systems model and sub-theory asks two very different questions. First, why are some parents warm and loving, and others cold, aggressive, neglecting and or rejecting? Is it true as predicted by IPARTheory that specific psychological, familial, community, and societal factors tend to be reliably associated everywhere in the world with specific variations in parental acceptance-rejection? Second, in what way is the total fabric of a nation as well as the behavior and beliefs of individuals within society affected by the fact that most parents in in that country tend to either accept or reject their children?<sup>9</sup>

As we grow and develop into whom God has called us to be, we often wonder how or why some women are able to rise above the rejections that they have experienced, and some succumb and would consider leaving ministry. What is it that allows some women to press ahead, while others crumble and fall? IPART teaches us that various events take place in our lives that can be traced back to our childhood. As children were we able to experience the love and acceptance from our parents or guardian? Or did we experience being left out, overlooked, always feeling judged or criticized by our parents? Were we overlooked, ostracized, or just not accepted by the adults in our midst? One of the questions that is asked in the Personality Sub-Theory is do children tend to respond in the same way when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by their parents and other attachment figures? There are children who are raised in the same household yet can be of different characteristics; therefore, the answer would be no, they do not always respond the same way. However, perception varies our outlook. The children who might

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<sup>8</sup> Rohner and Lansford, "Deep Structure of the Human Affectional System," 430.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald P. Rohner, *Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory and Evidence* (Storrs, CT: Berkeley Press, 2011), 3.

have perceived themselves to have been rejected by their parents often view themselves as rejected by those in authority over them, based on their perceptions from childhood.

Likewise, when the relationship between the parents and child is healthy, accepting, and loving, that child, who is now an adult, will have a more accepting view of those in authority, even if the individual is rejecting them. In other words, the relationship with our parents has a major effect on how we view or perceive the relationships that we now have as adults.

As I have observed from time to time with the rejection that women experience both in and out of church, some withstand their wounded hearts while others decide to quit. Reverend Jarena Lee has shown through her life's story that, although she was not raised in the church and was not taught the Word of God by her parents (mother), she pressed on in accepting her call to ministry. There was no one around her to encourage her, yet she persevered. It has been documented that she has tried to take her life on several occasions, as there was no one who provided support or encouragement. There was no example of another woman in ministry; yet when she tried to take her life, God stepped in and spared her life. Reverend Lee was later rejected and overlooked by her pastor when she made known her call to ministry, yet she did not allow his perception of her as a woman, who could not possibly be called by God, hinder her from following through with what she knew deep within her heart.

IPARTheory's Coping Sub-Theory deals with the question of how some rejected individuals can withstand the corrosive drizzle of day-to-day rejection without suffering the negative mental health consequences that most rejected individuals do. The response may be due to the sociocultural setting of the family. To understand the coping

mechanism of the individual and the coping process, we must first understand the entire acceptance-rejection process and adopt a multivariate, person-in-context perspective. This perspective has three elements: “Self,” “Other,” and “Context.” The “Self” characteristics include the individual’s mental representations along with the other internal (biological) and external (personality) characteristics. The “Other” characteristics include the personal and interpersonal characteristics of the rejecting other along with the form, frequency, duration, and severity of rejection. “Context characteristics include other significant people in the individual’s life, along with social-situational characteristics of the person’s environment.<sup>10</sup>

What was it that gave Reverend Lee the resilience to emotionally cope with the childhood rejection that she faced? Reverend Lee viewed the self with confidence, and she did not allow what the “others” around thought. She understood that it was God who has called her, and it was God who stepped in each time that she attempted to take her life. This rejection was not that of her parents overlooking her or due to mistreatment, however, she was not given the encouragement as a child and as a young woman who was beginning to recognize that God was doing something in her life. She lacked the support of a parent and or mother as her mother was not familiar with the scripture herself. The “self” characteristics include the individual’s mental representations along with the other internal (biological) and external (personality) characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rohner and Lansford, “Deep Structure of the Human Affectional System,” 14.

<sup>11</sup> R. P. Rohner, “Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory) and Evidence,” *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1055>.



As I was able to meet with some women in ministry throughout my eight years of being the coordinator of the Women in Ministry in my context, I have learned of their childhood stories and often wondered how they were able to be resilient to have overcome all that they have endured. In reflection, some of these women were of different sociocultural settings and varied parental household situations (single-parent vs. two-parent household), which may explain their response to the rejection that they have experienced in being overlooked time and time again for leadership roles. As these wounded healers continue to allow themselves to be healed by those who have been healed so that the work of the kingdom may continue, they are paving the path for other women, who may not have to experience the wounds that they did.

Interpersonal acceptance and rejection theory form the warmth dimension of interpersonal relationships. This is a continuum on which all humans can be placed because we all have experienced love at the hands of the people most important to us. It is also important to be aware that interpersonal acceptance-rejection can be viewed and studied from either of two perspectives. Acceptance-rejection can be studied as perceived or subjectively experienced by the individual (the phenomenological perspective), or it can be studied as reported by an outside observer (the behavioral perspective). These two perspectives lead to similar conclusions. However, if there is a discrepant conclusion, then it is expected to trust the phenomenological perspective.<sup>12</sup> J. Kagan states that in the

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<sup>12</sup> Rohner, "Introduction to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory," <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1055>.

context of a parent-child relationship, “Parental rejection is not a specific set of actions by parents, but a belief held by the child.”<sup>13</sup>

As I continue to examine the discipline of psychology, listening closer to the various voices within this discipline, I identify with psychiatrist Murray Bowen, who is credited with developing the Family Systems Theory. This theory focuses on patterns that develop in families to defuse anxiety within the family related to the perception of either too much closeness or too great a distance in a relationship.<sup>14</sup> Bowen’s theory consists of eight interlocking concepts:

Emotional Fusion and Differentiation of Self—“Fusion” or lack of differentiation is where individual choices are set aside in the service of achieving harmony within the system. Differentiation by contract is described as the capacity of the individual to function autonomously by making self-directed choices, while remaining emotionally connected to the intensity of a significant relationship system.<sup>15</sup> Fusion can be expressed as either as: -a sense of intense responsibility for another’s reaction or -by emotional “cutoff” from the tension with a relationship. Bowen’s research led him to suggest that varying degrees of fusion are discernible in all families. “Different” by contrast, is described as the capacity of the individual to function autonomously by making self-directed choices, while remaining emotionally connected to the intensity of a significant relationship system<sup>16</sup>

Triangles—These are the smallest stable relationship unit. Often interchangeable with triangulation, yet Bowen always speaks of triangling. Triangling, which is said to occur when the inevitable anxiety in a dyad is relieved by involving a vulnerable third party who either takes sides or provides a detour for the anxiety.<sup>17</sup> Under calm conditions it is difficult to identify triangles, but they emerge clearly under stress. Triangles are linked closely with Bowen’s concept of differentiation,

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<sup>13</sup> J. Kagan, “The Parental Love Trap,” *Psychology Today* 12 (August 1, 1978): 61, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/magazine/archive>.

<sup>14</sup> Jenny Brown, *Bowen Family Systems Theory and Practice: Illustration and Critique* (Neutral Bay, Australia: The Family Systems Institute, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> M. Kerr and M. Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* (New York, NY: Norton, 1998), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> K. James, “When Two Are Really Threes: The Triangular Dance in Couple,” *JFT* 10, no. 3 (1989): 179-189.

in that the greater the degree of fusion in a relationship, the more heightened is the pull to preserve emotional stability by forming a triangle. Triangling can become problematic when a third party's involvement distracts the members of a dyad from resolving their relationship impasse.<sup>18</sup>

**Nuclear Family Emotional System**—Bowen focuses on the impact of “undifferentiation” on the emotional functioning of a single-generation family. Relationship fusion, which leads to triangling, is the fuel for symptom formation in one of the three categories of formation. These are:

**Couple Conflict**—Bowen believes that permission to disagree is one of the most important contracts between individuals in an intimate relationship.<sup>19</sup> In a fused relationship, partners interpret the emotional state of the other as their responsibility, and the other's stated disagreement as a personal affront to them. Bowen also suggests the following three ways in which couple conflict can be functional for a fused relationship, in which each person is attempting to become more whole through the other:<sup>20</sup>

- 1- Conflict can provide a strong sense of emotional contact with the important other.
- 2- Conflict can justify people's maintaining a comfortable distance from each other without feeling guilty about it.
- 3- Conflict can allow one person to project anxieties they have about themselves onto the other, thereby preserving their positive view of self.<sup>21</sup>
  - a- **Symptoms in a Spouse**—In a fused relationship, where each partner looks to the other's qualities to fit his or her learned manner of relating to significant others, a pattern of reciprocity can be set in motion that pushes each spouse's role to opposite extremes.
  - b- **Symptoms in a Child**—The third symptom of fusion is when a child develops behavioral or emotional problems.

- 1- **Family Projection Process**—This process describes how children develop symptoms when they get caught up in the previous generation's anxiety about

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<sup>18</sup> Jenny Brown, *Bowen Family Systems Theory and Practice: Illustration and Critique* (Sydney, Australia: The Family Systems Institute, 1999), 96.

<sup>19</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 272-273.

<sup>20</sup> G. S. Lederer and J. Lewis, “The Transition to Couplehood,” *Reweaving the Family Tapestry*, ed. F. Herz Brown (New York, NY: Norton, 1991), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 192.

relationships. The child with the least emotional separation from his/her parents is said to be the most vulnerable to developing symptoms

- 2- Emotional Cutoff—Bowen describes this as the way people manage the intensity of fusion between the generations. It can be achieved through physical distance or through forms of emotional withdrawal. Bowen further distinguishes between “breaking away” from the family and “growing away from the family.”<sup>22</sup> “Growing away is viewed as part of differentiation-adult family members follow independent goals while also recognizing that they are part of their family system. A “cutoff” is more like an escape; people decide to be completely different to their family of origin. If one does not see himself/herself as part of the system, his/her only options are either to get others to change or to withdraw. If one sees himself/herself as part of the system, he/she has a new option: to stay in contact with others and change self.”<sup>23</sup>
- 3- Multi-Generational Transmission Process—This concept describes how patterns, themes, and positions (roles) in a triangle are passed down from generation to generation through projection from parent to child. The impact will be different for each child depending on the degree of triangling they have with their parents<sup>24</sup>
- 4- Sibling Positions—These could provide useful information in understanding the roles individuals tend to take in relationships. Walter Toman’s sibling profiles describe the eldest children as more likely to take on responsibility and leadership, with the younger siblings more comfortable dependent and allowing others to make decisions.<sup>25</sup>

Studies conclude that father/paternal love explains a unique and independent Portion of the variance in specific child outcomes over and above the portion Explained by maternal love. This study also that father love (acceptance-rejection) is often as strongly implicated as mother love in the development of behavioral and psychological problems as well as in the development of offspring’s sense of health and well-being.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 272-273.

<sup>23</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 272-273.

<sup>24</sup> Monica McGoldrick, “You Can Go Home Again,” Bowen Family Systems Theory and Practice: Illustration and Critique, Jenny Brown, <http://www.thefsi.com.au>.

<sup>25</sup> W. Toman, “Family Constellation,” Bowen Family Systems Theory and Practice: Illustration and Critique, Jenny Brown, <http://www.thefsi.com.au>.

<sup>26</sup> R. A. Ahmed et al., “Parental Acceptance and Rejection in the Arab World: How do They Influence Children’s Development?,” ERIC Files, 2016, 26, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED514028.pdf>.

Within my context, the relationship between interpersonal acceptance and rejection shows the interwovenness of the possible effects of the women feeling and experiencing rejection, while Family System Theory describes the Emotional Cutoff as the way in which persons manage the intensity of fusion between generations.<sup>27</sup> This Cutoff can take place through physical distance or through emotional withdrawal. As women who are constantly experiencing rejection, per one of Bowen's interlocking concepts, they demonstrate the Emotional Cutoff concept.

After experiencing rejection or being overlooked for some time, the women become emotionally withdrawn from the concept of being promoted, thus, now they no longer position themselves to be considered for future leadership roles. If the women no longer view themselves as part of the system, they either get others to change or withdraw. The body of Christ is often referred to as the family of God; how women perceive their role and position within this family system is critical to how they are treated or accepted.

In *God in the Midst of Her*, Elaine Flake states that "The Church (the family) must offer hope for renewal and a commitment to the universal health and well-being of these women who are in pain."<sup>28</sup> Within the family there are several dysfunctional roles that are in operation. Some of these dysfunctional roles go back to our childhood. Were we the scapegoat or the hero, the lost child, or the clown? Were we cradled and loved by our parents or were we left out and overlooked because we did not measure up to our other siblings?

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<sup>27</sup> Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation*, 192.

<sup>28</sup> Elaine Flake, *God in the Midst of Her* (Jamaica, NY: Harper Collins, 2000), 116.

As the scapegoat what is seen on the outside, through our actions and behavior, is that we are angry, impulsive, and feel as if we do not fit in. Or are we the lost child that is ignored, invisible, and overlooked? Jarena Lee, who was overlooked, ignored, and at times, felt and experienced being invisible during her gifting of being called to ministry, experienced the Lost Child Syndrome. Ms. Lee, like several women in ministry in my context, was overlooked and ignored, yet she persevered. She was very resilient in walking in that which she knew was God and not man.

The Personality Sub-Theory of IPART examines the causes of how we perceive ourselves to be accepted or rejected by others, while the Coping Sub-Theory deals with what gives some children and adults the resilience to emotionally deal with rejection. As women who have accepted their call to ministry, they must trust that the God that called them will keep them and will keep them from falling. Their resilience, despite their upbringing of being accepted or rejected as a child, has helped them to not remain the lost child or to become the scapegoat.

The Bible speaks of unity in the body of Christ: one Faith, one God, one Baptism. We are also encouraged in scripture to pray ye one for another; in other words, we are to lift each other up and strengthen each other. We are to love each other as Christ loves the Church (Jn. 13:34); by doing this we will be known as disciples of Christ (Jn. 13:35). As members of the body of Christ, loving each other, we should accept each other, recognize the God in each other, and treat each other with love.

Bowen's understanding of the family continues to align with scripture that states:

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on my menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Jl. 2:28-29).

Bowen understood the unity of the family (the body of Christ, the church) that seeks to understand that we are one in God.

While it is evident in this context that women are often overlooked or rejected for placement in larger congregations or in leading organizations, it is apparent that the scripture of Psalm 118:22, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,”<sup>29</sup> continues to prove true. Within each ordination class, females are greater in number “than males, and within the local church, females are the majority. It is evident that women who are reflective of the stone and the builders can be compared to the leaders (bishops) of the church and will come to understand that the women are the cornerstone of our church. Women who are natural helpers and supporters are also very gifted with leadership, administrative, and financial skills. Yet, rejection is very rampant in the church. As women continue to persevere through the rejection and continue to make themselves known, I am confident that they will be acknowledged for their gifts and who they are.

R. Robert Creech, in *Family Systems and Congregational Life: A Map for Ministry*, continues to build on Bowen’s Family System Theory in explaining that our Christian life inherently is all about relationships. The Jesus creed is simple: love God and love neighbor.<sup>30</sup> Creech explains everything occurs in relationship within the ministry of Jesus, and that Jesus never did anything with only one of his disciples. He shows how Jesus treated everyone equally.

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<sup>29</sup> *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 863.

<sup>30</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2014).  
8.

As Bowen explains the eight theoretical concepts of Family Systems Theory, Creech explains the family as being in relationship with one another as Jesus is in relationship with each one of us. He explains that in Jesus' creed, Jesus taught about loving our enemies, forgiving offenders, and serving others. As women who are wounded within the church and by the church by constantly being overlooked, not recognized, and or acknowledged, they are expected to continue to love those who have rejected them and overlooked them.

As women continue to lack the support, affirmation, and encouragement that is needed in ministry and walk in Jesus' creed, forgiveness is an act that must be practiced. Forgiveness has two sides: giving and receiving. Levels of differentiation affect how both operate in a system. The more differentiated we are, the less reactive we are to others and the lower our need for "togetherness."<sup>31</sup> The more emotionally mature we are, the freer that we may be to extend forgiveness to others for their offenses, rather than to harbor resentment, live at a distance, retaliate, form triangles, cut off from the family or from relationships, or begin to underproduce or overproduce.

It has been stated that females mature faster or more than males. This may explain the interpersonal acceptance and rejection that ask what it is that makes the child or adult rise above the rejection that they might have experienced. What is it that causes them to be resilient? Creech explains that it is the maturity that allows one to rise above the wounds and or rejection and forgive others for the wrong that was done to them.

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<sup>31</sup> Robert R. Creech, *Family Systems and Congregational Life: A Map for Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 108.



## Conclusion

This chapter provided a closer viewpoint of IPART as well as the Family Systems Theory through definition and a look at how the impact of oversight, isolation, and rejection, the Personality Sub-Theory, the Coping Sub-Theory, and the Sociocultural Systems Model and Sub-Theory can or may affect the way we view or acknowledge ourselves. As we listen to the voices of IPART and Family Systems Theory within this context, they continue to confirm how the rearing of our children – especially females – can have a significant impact on their adult behavior and lifestyle.

One of the things learned from this research is that the word “rejection,” regarding children, implies bad parenting and sometimes even bad people. In a cross-cultural and multiethnic society, one must attempt to view the word as being descriptive of both parents’ and other’s behavior, not judgmental or evaluative. There is also the need to accept, encourage, support, and affirm females from a young age, which will assist in building resilience, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

Although women have been the victim of abuse in all forms, being wounded within the church is the last place that they expected to be hurt. However, some of the deepest pain takes place within the walls of this sacred space. Henry Nouwen made synonymous the “wounded healer” and the minister. He describes the wounded healer as individuals who “must look after their own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.”<sup>32</sup> His writing continues to explain that alienation, isolation, and loneliness are both wounding and expressions of our woundedness, and that we often experience these wounding incidents through other persons.

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<sup>32</sup> Henri J. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York, NY: Image Book, 1979), 43.

In reflecting on Mr. Nouwen's writings of the wounded healer, I gained a better understanding of the wounds that takes place within the context of ministry/church. The understanding of the church being a hospital is clearer after the reading of *The Wounded Healer*. People gather at the church with the intention of trying to heal others, yet at times, instead of healing we add more wounds to that which already existed. We may not physically injure each other, but we alienate, overlook, reject, and cause many to feel isolated and not good enough.

As women are becoming more educated and self-assured of who they are, and as their self-esteem is built up and they are becoming confident in themselves, they no longer will crumble up when they are overlooked or ostracized, but will remain steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the things of God. Women have been overlooked and rejected for so long, from childhood into adulthood, that some accept it as a part of life while others are willing to go above and to learn how to position themselves, knowing and believing that their turn will come. They are not willing to turn and run away but are willing to stand in their calling until it is their turn for their leadership role. We must also be very careful as women that we are now educated, positioned, and are moving into leadership roles, that we don't inflict wounds upon our sisters who are not yet healed and trying to navigate the system of patriarchy and misogyny.

This interdisciplinary chapter reinforced the need to continue to uplift, encourage, and affirm our little girls to be their best selves. I am reminded of the importance of the words that we speak over our children – especially females – in knowing that the same God that called their male relatives can also call them. This research reminded me that just as Jarena Lee did not give up and throw in the towel, I too cannot give up. I am

reminded of the two little children (a boy and a girl) during an Easter program; the male child was told that he was going to be a leader, a pastor one day, while the little girl was told that will be a good missionary or evangelist one day.

Was it a revelation a prophetic word from God that the title of pastor and or leader is towards this young man, and what they saw for this little girl was appropriate? As I continue this project, it is evident that there is a need to encourage little girls as much as little boys to be the best that they can be. To encourage them both to be leaders in whatever area of life that they chose and that there is nothing that they cannot accomplish.

As women, we must learn to position ourselves in places and spaces where we are seen and or observed for the work that we can do, and we must be willing to help another female learn to position themselves. We must learn to encourage, support, and affirm each other in achieving our goals. As women in ministry, despite our past, accepted or rejected by our parents, the roles and or positions that we have within our family, it is important for us to know that we are in another family – the family of God – and we are to show forth the spirit of acceptance to each other.

As women, we must also begin to accept other woman as our leader and render the same respect as we give to our male leaders. Because women have been taught to respect male leadership and has grown to only see or view men in leadership roles, it has become challenging for women to accept another woman in that role. However, I do believe and pray that as more and more women are given the opportunity to be in leadership, then they will be accepted by both males and females to whom they are leading.

By analyzing the context, the growth of women being appointed to leadership positions is taking place very slowly; however, there is still a long way for us to go. As we gather for large gathering, it was pointed out that women make up 98% of the church, yet only 20% of those in leadership are women. More women are being strategically positioned, but not enough are positioned to make a difference.

Also, as women, we must also learn not to be the oppressor to other women once we are in position. Statistically, it has been reported that most abusers were once abused themselves. As women, although we have been rejected, ostracized, or overlooked, we must learn not to repeat the same behavior. I am confident that as women, we will continue to hold up the church, our families, and society. We are the backbone/the cornerstone that has been rejected, yet we are the ones that keep things going. I believe that if women are encouraged, supported, and affirmed, their confidence will be increased and they will begin to position themselves for leadership roles, when invited to the table, will take another woman along, and in so doing, the church will be the healing station, the hospital that it is suggested by St. Augustine centuries ago. When this change begins to take place, we will be able to be witnesses by each one teaching and reaching another.

As the church, being the family of God, we must remember that our position in the family is important. We must be careful not to emotionally cut others off, recognize where fusion is taking place and that we are not caught in a triangular situation. We must be mindful of the family trap, of not scapegoating each other, allowing others to feel like a mascot or that they are the lost child. Instead, we should help each other to feel wanted, accepted, important and needed. We are the church of Jesus Christ, who declared that on this rock he will build his church. We are both male and female, Jews, and Gentiles. We

are the true representation of the church, so therefore, we must do as Jesus did, treat each other with love and compassion and not govern ourselves over each other.

As the church make small attempts to make room for more women to take their rightful place in leadership, women who are in leadership are becoming more supportive of each other. They have learned to support and encourage each other through the rough days. Women who have walked the path of rejection or lack of support have learned that their only way of survival, their only way of achieving their goals were to be “my sister’s keeper.” They have learned to cover each other in prayer. They have learned to hold each other’s hands, wipe the tears from each other’s faces and celebrate each other at the appropriate time.

Women have learned to develop relationships with each other that has kept them throughout their lifetimes; and has helped them to maintain their sanity in ministry. As I continue my journey, I am learning to develop relationships with other women that are sustainable. As one who was overlooked growing up and continue to experience being overlooked and rejected as an adult, I am learning to press through as I keep my eyes towards the hills where my help is coming from as I go towards the mark of a higher calling in Christ Jesus my Lord. The next chapter will delineate the details of the project implementation and the summary of learnings supporting the affirmation of the hypothesis.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The formation of this project began during the first semester at United Theological Seminary during the mid-year session. After reviewing my spiritual autobiography, receiving comments from mentors, and having private conversations with my peer associate, the project theme started to evolve. Initially, I fought the theme idea, as I was still hiding from the reality of what I had and continued to experience throughout my life. Listening to my peer associate and mentors, I became more aware of the project direction. Although faced with all the research requirements, I remained focused and formulated the project hypothesis that if women in ministry were offered a series of workshops and provided affirmation and support for their gifts, then they would feel empowered to pursue leadership roles without hesitancy.

Therefore, this research project entitled, “Women in Ministry: Empowered to Serve” is a healing and restorative model that aims to empower, encourage, affirm, and support women in ministry, specifically those who have been rejected, broken, and not heard simply because of their gender. The voice of patriarchy continues to rule despite the progress of women over the years. The project goal is to empower each participant to fulfill the plan of God in their life. The hypothesis is that “if women in ministry are

offered a series of workshops, and provide affirmation, and support of their gifts, then they will feel empowered to pursue leadership roles without hesitancy.

Each year, our Annual Conferences are ordaining more women than men, and more women are receiving their elders' orders (a Master's in Divinity is necessary for elders' ordination). Many of which already possess their doctorate or are in pursuit of their doctorate degree. However, the women are always assigned to the smaller churches, especially if it is their first pastorate. Women are being overlooked time and time again for appointments to positions on the Trustee Board, Steward Board, or the Finance Committee. As women are often rejected, this can lead to women being hurt and broken. Healing and restoration for the church is possible. As we become increasingly conscious of the challenges that women have experienced throughout time, and women continue to hold fast to the calling of Jesus Christ, then we will better understand that we – men and women – have been created by the same God and will begin to make room for each other.

For many years, I have allowed myself to be held back in many areas of my life. I remain in others' shadows because I have lost my voice and felt the spirit of rejection in many areas of my life. However, as I remained faithful to the voice of God and have come to a better understanding of the scripture that states, "the stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (Ps. 118:22). I have learned that although man may reject me, God is in control of my destiny.

Historically, women have always been characterized as second-class citizens. Despite their lack of recognition and acknowledgment, women continue to pursue and strive to reach their God-given destiny. Women are beginning to make their mark not only within the church but also within society. I have repeatedly witnessed time and time

again, across denominational lines, the steadfast hold of patriarchy holding on to leadership roles despite their (at times) lack of education, compassion, skills, and love for God's people within the church.

Within my context of the New York Annual Conference, there are more women with higher earned degrees than their male counterparts, yet more women are placed in smaller congregations. Education is encouraged in my context, and more women are pursuing higher education. More women are being ordained at our Annual Conferences, and time and time again, women are being sent to congregations that are challenged in paying their pastors a fair salary, congregations where the people are broken, and the buildings are in desperate need of restoration. Often, women are sent to a particular congregation where both the building and the people require restoration, and as soon as the restoration takes place, they are appointed to another congregation, and a male is sent to the restored church to lead the congregants.

As I observed the politics of the nomination and election of the biases of having men elected to leadership roles within the church, I realized that as women, we are not positioning ourselves to be elected to these positions. As women, we must be confident in who we are and the gifts God has given us and know that as God has called them (the men), he has also called us women. Reverend Jarena Lee stated, "Has God not called women too as he has called men? Is he a whole God?"<sup>1</sup> As our gifts make room for us, we must also begin making room for ourselves and others. We must be willing to support each other and recommend each other when asked for a recommendation. We must be

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<sup>1</sup> Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee: Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 15.



willing to show up at meetings, be seen, and let it be known that we are available to do the required work.

This project provided a safe space with professionally trained facilitators to lead the workshops which was designed to empower the participants to see themselves through God's eyes. The workshops strengthened their sense of being and empowered them to rise above the rejection they experienced, especially in ministry.

### **Methodology**

As a former Women in Ministry Coordinator for eight years, I have spoken with several women about various topics. So, I was familiar with their stories. However, would they be willing to share openly, publicly, and with those with whom they were familiar with their stories? As the invitation was extended via a flyer (Appendix A) to several women in the New York Conference, their responses were "No." Although their responses were no, they were very apologetic, stating that their schedules would not allow them to participate fully for six weeks. Some admitted they were unwilling to share their experiences openly, while others shared their concerns of losing their positions or of leadership getting feedback on what had been shared. They were informed of the confidentiality that was required for all participants, yet they chose not to be a participant.

As I thought of this project, I became excited and reluctant. I was concerned if the women would remain committed, would they be willing to share their stories as well as being open to hearing and receiving what each facilitator taught on empowering them to pursue leadership roles.

After some time, I decided to not lean on my own understanding, but to seek God in all my ways. I inquired of God, and he led me to those whom he would have to participate. When I followed his instructions, they all responded with a “yes, I would love to participate” and then they began to share with me their stories of rejection both in and out of the church.

The hypothesis was measured using the qualitative analysis research approach. Participants were given pre- and post-surveys (distributed via Survey Monkey) and conducted individual interviews, personal journaling, and observations that measured the outcome of the hypothesis. The project implementation incorporated two-hour sessions that lasted over six weeks. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, each session was held via Zoom.

The participants were asked to commit for the project duration, which was scheduled to take place over six-weeks, and each session would take place for two hours (Appendix B). Each participant was assigned a biblical female name known only by the participant and the researcher. The pre- and post-questions (Appendix C) that were asked by the participants were:

- a. How do you define brokenness?
- b. Have you ever experienced brokenness in your life? If so, what form did this brokenness take and how did it affect you?
- c. How do you define rejection?
- d. Have there ever been instances and or incidents in your life where you have felt rejected? If so, what form did this rejection take and how did it affect you?

- e. How do you define or otherwise describe the concept “a person’s voice?”
- f. In what ways can the thoughts, words and or actions of another person or third-party impact how you exercise your voice?
- g. Have you ever experienced any instance, incident or occasion where you felt that “your voice” was stifled, rejected, minimized, harshly attacked and or denigrated? If so, please describe such experience.
- h. If you have felt as if there were persons/individuals that stifled, rejected, minimized, harshly attacked and or denigrated “your voice” who have these persons been? When identifying who these persons are, please also identify their relationship to you as well and their gender.

The data collection method of Survey Monkey was utilized to assure the participants’ confidentiality and privacy of their responses. They were asked permission to record each weekly session, their agreement to participate in individual focused-centered interviews, and they were assured that the recordings aided in data collection and facilitated accurately reporting their responses (Appendix E). The participants were informed that their written and recorded responses would be secured for a total of five years, after which all documents would be destroyed, via shredding of all written paperwork, and deleting all audio and video recordings.

### *Workshop Presenters*

While I was at intensive week for our third semester and was gaining more information from mentors and fellow classmates, who were in my semester and semesters ahead of us, I began praying about my presenters. Two names came to mind, and I

automatically texted them both. One of them immediately responded with a “yes, whatever you need me to do, just let me know. I am available to assist.” The other presenter was out of town and did not respond immediately. We later met up at a funeral, she apologized for not getting back, but after a brief discussion, she agreed to be a presenter. When she was asked to lead the psychological portion of the project, she stated that she would prefer to be in person but agreed that virtual sessions would be safe due to the increase in COVID-19 cases.

The project consisted of six two-hour sessions, divided into two sections, the psychological and spiritual aspects of the project. The psychological aspect was conducted by the Reverend Dr. Aldrena Mabry, and the spiritual aspect was conducted by the Reverend Dr. Kim Anderson.

Both presenters are ordained clergywomen in my context, they understood the importance of confidentiality, and are very knowledgeable in their perspective field. The psychologist, Reverend Dr. Aldrena Mabry, was employed by the Brentwood School system for thirty years before her retirement, and she maintained her private practice after her retirement. For the project, she was asked to conduct workshops on self-esteem and confidence building, knowing who you are, and addressing childhood events that may have contributed to current feelings of low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and rejection.

The second presenter, Reverend Dr. Kim Anderson, serves as a Presiding Elder for the Manhattan District at the New York Annual Conference. The focus of her Doctor of Ministry was family and marriage counseling. Before answering the call to being a Presiding Elder, Dr. Anderson pastored two congregations. One in New York for twelve years, and her first church was in New Jersey, where she pastored for eight years. Dr.

Anderson has extensive experience as a counselor for families and marriages, but as a counselor for the Foster Care System in New York.

I chose not to be a presenter as I thought my focus needed to ensure that participants signed in on time and were let into the Zoom room. Each workshop was opened in prayer and an icebreaker. I also explained the weekly engagement rules as a reminder of how to govern ourselves on Zoom. Each participant was asked to remain on camera, as I felt the need to be observant of facial expressions and body language. I also reminded them of the confidentiality consent form that was signed, their commitment to keeping all information shared during each workshop confidential, and my commitment to keeping their information safe, private, and confidential.

### *Project Implementation Plan*

The project began on February 25, 2022 and continued through April 1, 2022. A total of six sessions started on Friday evenings for two weeks followed by four weeks that were held on Saturday evenings at 6:30 p.m. all held via Zoom. Each session opened with prayer, a reminder of maintaining confidentiality, (what is shared in each session remain in the session), and an ice breaker.

As the New York Annual Conference was held the last week in April and closed the first Sunday in May, ideally, after consulting with my Context Associate, we conducted the workshops between late February and early April. It was also planned to continue after the conference with the support group, as emotions may flare up due to some not being elected to leadership positions and witnessing once again how patriarchy continue to dominate leadership roles in the church.

The following preliminary activities (based on February – April implementation plan) were conducted:

- Letter of invitation to possible participants – August 2021
- Confirm workshop facilitators, and willing participants – August 2021.
- Initial planning meeting with context, professional, and peer associates, as well as workshop facilitators to finalize workshop dates, topics of discussion, focus and content of workshop – September 2021.
- Confirm workshop site or zoom information – October 2021
- Connect with and confirm with vendor or friends to provide lunch for the participants.

### **Implementation**

As this project was divided into two parts (the psychological and the spiritual), at the start of each session, the participants were informed and reminded as to why we were gathered. They were provided with information about the process of getting to this point and what was ahead. I explained how each chapter was related in that the scripture for the biblical foundations chapter, Psalm 118:22, supported the theme, which was formulated from my spiritual autobiography, and the historical figure chosen for this project is Jarena Lee. The participants smiled, shook their heads in agreement and shared that they were able to see the relationship between the scripture and the historical figure that was selected. I then shared the choice for my theological foundations chapter and the decision to use Womanist Theology, followed by the interdisciplinary focus of psychology and the theory chosen (Interpersonal Acceptance and Rejection Theory) was an opener for many

as they stated that they have never heard of this theory. After explaining the theory and its relatedness to the project, several of the participants commented as to how it all connected to the project, and they were also pleased with the organizational planning of this doctoral program of starting the writing process from the very first semester. Notably, my prayer was that at least one would be encouraged to attend United Theological Seminary. I was also inspired that the participants were able to comprehend the formation of this project.

The participants were also informed as to how the IRB governs the project and workshops and relating to keeping all information safe. That we are accountable for securing all materials pertaining to the workshops and project safe and secure. As all these various areas of the overall project are connected, showing the connectedness of each chapter is expected to reveal the rejection and brokenness that women have and are still experiencing within the church. The hope and goal of these workshops is to provide space where women can be open with each other, sharing their stories, being heard, studying the chosen biblical scripture for this project, examining the role of women both in and out of the Bible, and gaining self-esteem and confidence building information. With the expected goal that after these workshops they would be empowered, encouraged, supported, and affirmed in pursuing higher roles/positions within their church or conferences.

The project start date was February 25, 2022, and ended on April 1, 2022. A total of six sessions started on Friday evenings at 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. for two weeks followed by four weeks that were held on Saturday evenings at 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. all held via Zoom. Each session included music prior to starting, opened with prayer, a

reminder of maintaining confidentiality, (what is shared in each session remain in the session), an ice breaker, worship, and Bible study. The individual interviews also took place via Zoom. The study consisted of twelve participants (women) who were provided with pre- and post-survey questions sent via Survey Monkey to maintain confidentiality.

### *Demographics of Participants*

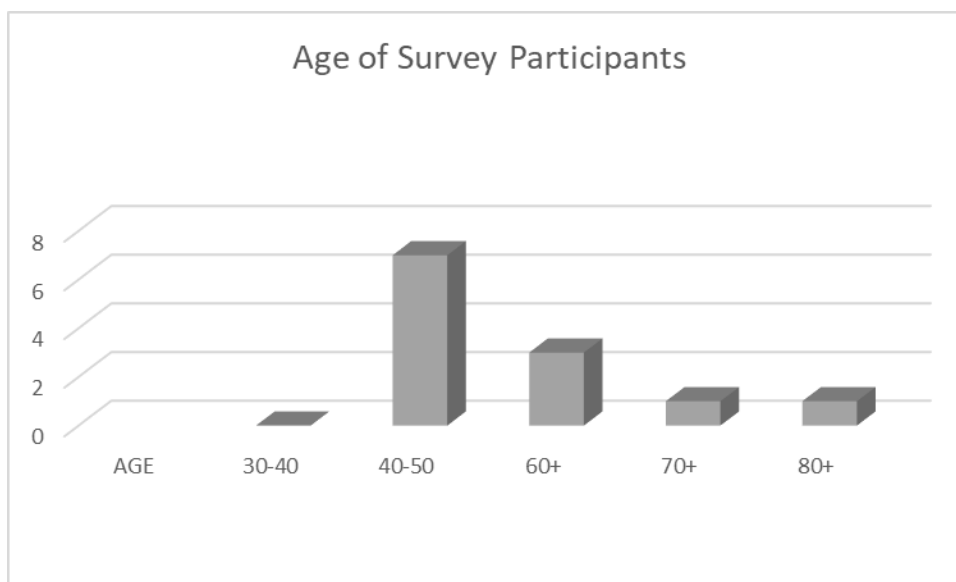


Figure 1. Age of survey participants

The participants for this project were all women who are in ministry over eighteen years of age, and reportedly not currently pregnant. One participant was invited by another participant. This participant was from another denomination which was great as this is a concern across denominational lines. Two other participants from another denomination after receiving the flyer agreed to be participants. Before long, I had twelve participants, of which three of them were outside of my context. The participants consisted of nine individuals who were African Methodist Episcopal (AME), one United Methodist (UMC), one United Church of Christ (UCC), and another Pentecostal. I was



excited to have twelve participants and even more excited to have three women from other denominations.

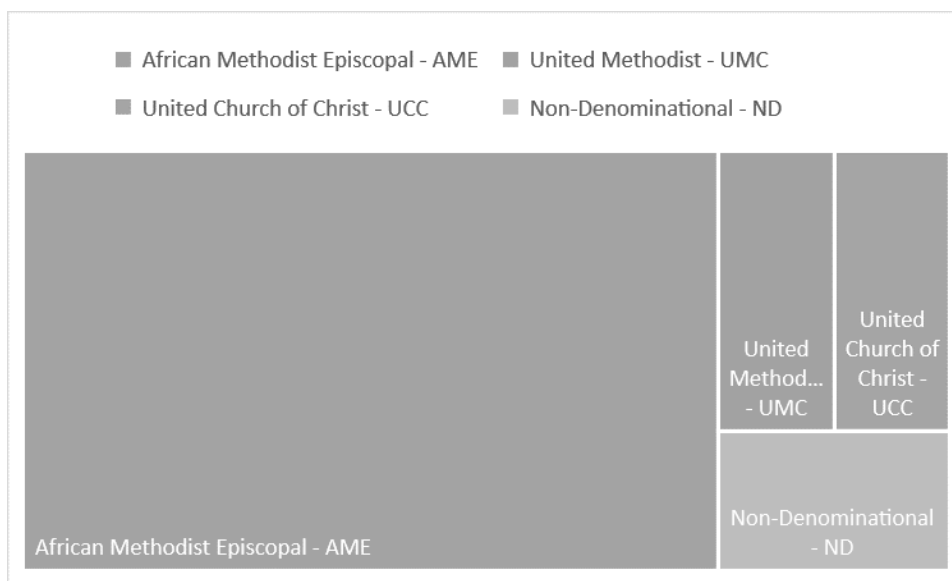


Figure 2. Participants by denomination

The participants are all adult women and not pregnant. The youngest was in her forties and the eldest is in her eighties. All but one has a master's degree. Eight are ordained clergy, three are pastors, seven are or were in education (teacher or assistant principal) of which four are retired, and one participant is an administrative assistance. For confidentiality purposes, each participant was assigned a biblical female name. They were asked not to share their biblical name with any one as their identification was known only by them and myself. They were asked to use their identifiable biblical name in their journal and on the pre- and post-survey questions.

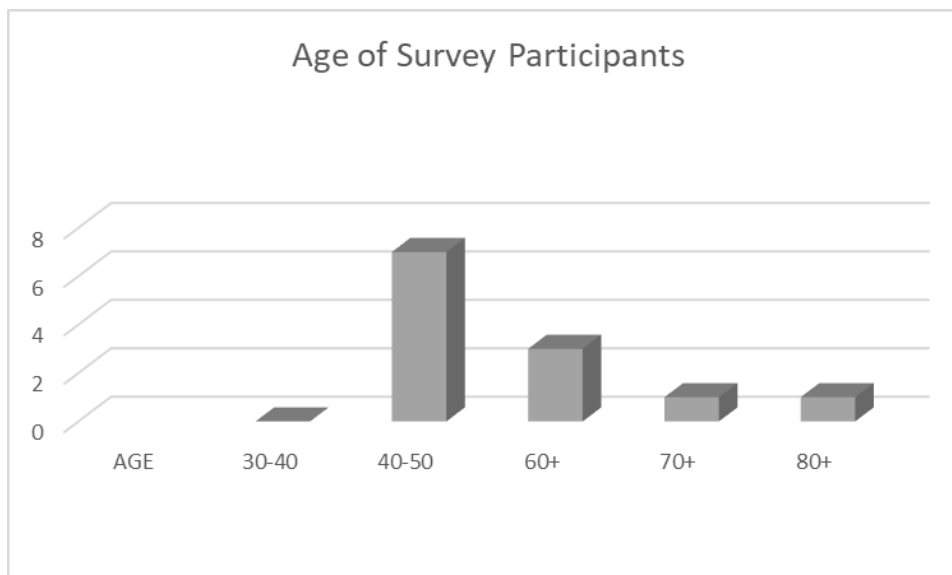


Figure 3. Age of survey participants

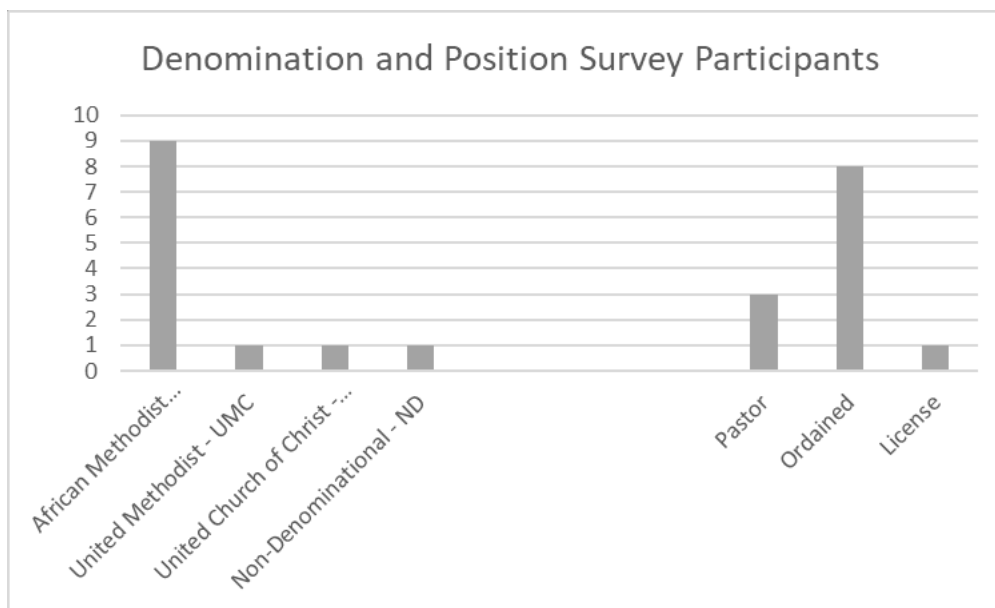


Figure 4. Denomination and position survey of participants

Qualified, educated, and experienced facilitators led the workshops. The six workshops were divided into two sections, and each facilitator led three workshops. As previously mentioned, the hypothesis was measured using qualitative analysis of pre- and post-surveys, journal writings, interviews, and observations to determine the outcome.

Due to the state of New York's increased number of COVID-19 cases, all two-hour workshops took place via Zoom for six weeks, starting at 6:30 p.m. ending at 8:30 p.m.

### *Week One*

The workshops were all scheduled to start at 6:30 p.m. Each participant was given the zoom log-in information within the letter of consent and were asked to sign on as early as 6:15 p.m. for the workshops to begin promptly at 6:30 p.m. As they signed on, they were greeted by music playing.

Promptly at 6:30 p.m., I greeted all the participants and thanked them for logging on before 6:30 p.m. in order that we may start on time and, therefore, end on time. They were reminded of the consent that they all signed, the importance of maintaining confidentiality and respecting each other as each person would share. They were also informed that everyone's experience is not the same. Therefore, everyone should be respectful of everyone's experience.

The participants were asked to complete the pre-survey that was sent out via Survey Monkey of which several stated that they completed on the first day of the workshop, while others reported having completed it previously. I opened in prayer, and an icebreaker was introduced. The icebreaker involved each participant giving a positive description of the first letter of their first name. The rules of the game were that they were not allowed to write down the names that came before theirs as this was a way of getting to know each other. After saying their name and the name using the letter of their first name, the next participant had to repeat the name(s) of those who went before that participant. I started the icebreaker, Joyful Jackie, the next participant was chosen from

left to right as shown on my screen. That participant had to do likewise by repeating joyful Jackie then introducing themselves along with an adjective that describes their personality. As we moved into the fifth and sixth participants, they were all repeating the names, it was fun and really did as it was intended to do, to release the tension, and anxiety and allowed each one to relax and become comfortable. The participants began getting very creative with their descriptions making it more challenging, interesting, and fun for all. This game ended with the facilitator being the last to share and was unable to repeat all the names as there were thirteen names that she needed to have repeated.

After the icebreaker, the participants all shared that they enjoyed the game and that it helped with relaxing them. The facilitator was introduced and presented as the facilitator was known to some of the participants. Her biography was read and shared of the relationship between the facilitator and me. The facilitator greeted the participants and shared that she was excited to be a part of this project. She also shared that it is something that is very prevalent within the church and outside of the church, how women continue to be overlooked and experience rejection and how it can and does affect our self-esteem.

This first session was entitled: “Developing a Healthy Concept.” We were able to discuss and define self-esteem, competitive memory theory and how changing our thoughts can and will help change our lives. The facilitator helped us to understand that it is a matter of perspective, and will we believe God or what others say about us? The facilitator gave us “I Believe” affirmations:

I Believe:

- I strongly believe I am strong

- I am smart ... I am beautiful ... I am accepted
- I am resilient... I am resourceful... I am creative
- I was created in the image of God to glorify him
- I have divinely unique calling and purpose

All the participants were active participants as we also discussed living by our beliefs.

The closer our belief system lines up with our actions, the more fulfillment we will experience. Knowing ourselves and our divine purpose is a prerequisite to establishing and maintaining a healthy self-concept. The sessions ended as the participants were asked to write a reflection from this week's session. They were also given homework assignment based on the topic discussion. The homework assignment was:

- What would you do if you could not fail?
- What would happen if all your dreams came true?
- What would happen if God granted your prayer requests?

Week one session ended in prayer and thanking them for attending and being active participants. They were encouraged to journal and to be as honest as they possibly can with themselves.



Figure 5. Good self-esteem

### *Week Two*

The participants arrived prior to 6:30 p.m. for the session to begin promptly on time. All twelve-participant returned for the second week. The session was opened with prayer and an ice breaker. The question was asked who had remembered everyone's names and their descriptive names. The challenge was on and several volunteered to try. Unfortunately, no one was able to remember the adjectives, but they remembered each other's names. They were then reminded of the rules of engagement of confidentiality, respect for each other while speaking and of the reporting of each other's stories. One participant shared how much she was blessed from the last session. She shared that speaking to herself daily as to what she believes about herself was challenging, but she

was able to follow through. She stated that she never realized how much she did not believe for herself who she was. She stated that since childhood, she has always been told who she was and although she is an adult and is in ministry, after the last session, she realized that she has been living based on what others thought that she was and believed about herself. Another shared that the exercise was also challenging as her voice has been silenced for so long that she is beginning to wonder what her voice sounds like.

Regarding the homework assignment, some stated answering those questions were challenging. One reported that she was stuck at the first question, “What would you do if you could not fail? She stated that at first, she had a long list, but eventually the list became shorter. She also stated she knows that if she was given the choice to participate in some ministries, that she would be effective and be an asset to the ministry, but as she was never given an opportunity, there was a need to really examine as to what would she do if she could not fail. While she pondered that thought, others were honest and stated that they did not do the assignment.

As we gathered for our second session, confidence building was the focus. The facilitator shared on the following topics:

- Change Your Thoughts; Change Your Life – scripture references Proverb 23:7 and Psalm 119:71.
- It is a Matter of Perspective – scripture references Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28.
- Again, we recited affirmations statements. This week’s affirmations were, I am...  
I am accomplished.

I am blessed and beloved.

I am loving and lovable.

I am smart and successful.

I am creative and confident.

I am disciplined and determined.

I am a child of the Most-High God.

I am who God says I am.

I am becoming all I was created to be in Jesus' name.

Homework assignment and thought for journal writing was:

- How much do you believe in yourself? Yourself 25% more?
- Do you believe Philippians 4:13 for yourself? That you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you?

As we came to the end of another fruitful session, the conversations continued. I reminded them that we will continue next week as there is a need to be appreciative of everyone's time. They were reminded to write in their journals and to complete the homework assignment. Session ended with prayer.

### *Week Three*

Prior to the start of the final session with this facilitator, I contacted each participant and informed them that although it was not previously discussed, I would like for each one to give the facilitator a gift. This gift, however, would not cost them anything. The gift that each was asked to give the facilitator was, as there were twelve participants, each was given a letter of her full name. They were then asked to give her a



word of encouragement, support, or affirmation. To God be the Glory, there were twelve letters in her first and last name. The participants all agreed.

As the third session started, all twelve participants returned for week three. Again, they shared how much they enjoyed the sessions and were sad that this portion was ending. The session began with prayer and an icebreaker. This week's icebreaker was different from the past two weeks. In week three's icebreaker, they were asked to share three things:

- to share a positive statement about themselves.
- to make a bold declarative statement about themselves,
- to make a bold statement about their future.

Unlike the past weeks, this icebreaker did not make them laugh, quick to respond, or appeared to be relaxed. Some participants struggled to make a positive statement about themselves. One participant stated that this was a hard icebreaker. Another asked if they could make the statements about another participant, while others were able to respond to the statements.

Some of the participants shared that this icebreaker and the homework assignments caused them to dig deep and to reflect on all the work that needed to be done in them. The facilitator shared that her job was effective, as that was the purpose, to help us as women to begin to dismantle the walls that has been placed upon us. The walls of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and losing our voices. She explained for women to grow into their God-given destiny, they must see self through the eyes of God and not of man.

Topics of discussion for this final week with our facilitator included:

Forgetfulness and Fruitfulness - Genesis 41:51-52, and Philippians 3:13-14, Restoration and Rebuilding and Hearing the Voice of God. We were encouraged to stop looking in the rearview mirror as we journey through life. We must reevaluate, reframe, and repent for the past and to reassess and reevaluate our present and future, while we reposition ourselves to move forward to embrace the bright future that God has planned for each of us. We must realign ourselves with the word, will, and way of the Lord (Eph. 5:10). Finally, we were encouraged to get some rest, rest is a God command, to do something good for someone else, sowing and reaping:

- Expect success
- Expect to win
- Practice radical self-acceptance
- Ask for help/support and to take advantage of restorative opportunities
- Reward/treat yourself often-schedule regular getaways or retreats
- Volunteer to share certain skills with others (visiting, hosting, reading etc.)
- Post healing, affirming scriptures, and reminders in obvious places
- Allow personal time to retreat to yourself each
- Associate with people, places, and situations that nurture, build, and support you
- Think positively, speak positively
- Take the limits off God and yourself, spend time visualizing yourself healthy, happy, and whole

The facilitator encouraged us to practice hearing the voice of God, scripture references are as follows - Isaiah 30:21, Romans 10:17, John 10:27 and 1 John 5:14. Closing statement from the facilitator.... “And She (He) Remembered Who, She (He) Was.”

As the session ended, I thanked the participants for attending, for being present for the first three sessions and encouraged them to attend the next three sessions. They all stated that they intend to be present. They all then asked if the sessions could be extended as there is a need to have future discussions. The facilitator also shared that this is a topic to be discussed and shared that she is so happy to see that this topic is being discussed and amongst women who are in ministry. For women to begin to address these issues. Before closing, I informed the facilitator that we had gifts for her. She stated that there was no need for a gift. I informed her that this gift she will appreciate. I proceeded to ask the first participant to proceed. By the time it was over the facilitator was shocked, was in amazement and was in tears. She expressed how blessed she felt for the words spoken to her. As each participant did not only give a one-word description with the letter but spoke words of encouragement and or affirmation in support of the word. Each participant again expresses to both the facilitator and me their gratitude for these weeks. I too again thanked the participants and facilitator, and the facilitator closed the session in prayer.

#### *Week Four*

This fourth session, second half of the six-week session started first with all participants logging in early as asked and promised. Week four and all twelve participants were present. I was grateful and happy to see each one as they were excited and ready to start the second half.

As the participants logged on, soft, instrumental soaking music was being played. The session opened with prayer, followed by a review of the rules of engagement, the importance of confidentiality, being respectful of each other, and remaining on camera throughout the session. An icebreaker of mindfulness was done which allowed everyone to be relaxed and focus. The facilitator for the second half of the project was introduced and presented to the participants. Like the previous facilitator, some of the participants knew her and some did not. She greeted everyone and shared how grateful she was to be asked to participate in this project. She briefly shared her story as she was recently promoted within the church, but the struggles that came prior to this promotion. She also shared the struggle of ministry of knowing who you are and being able to walk in your own identity and not that of others. Her assignment for the evening was a Bible study of the biblical text for the project, Psalm 118:22, the stone that the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone, and was titled: “Rejected by man, but made for God’s purpose.”

Bible study on Rejected by Man but Made for God’s Purpose, “A Look at Psalm 118:22.” During this Bible study a closer examination of the chapter of the Psalm was done at length. The Psalm’s author was unknown; however, it expresses Thanksgiving to God for whose love never changes. The first four verses end with the sentence: “His Love endures forever.” As the study took a closer look at the key verse, verse twenty-two, the questions that were asked were: 1- what words caught your attention and what does this verse say to you? Immediately, as like a kindergarten class, the participants “rejected” and “cornerstone.” Discussion pursued around rejection and other places in the Bible where others also experienced rejection. This conversation opened the door for the

participants to begin to share some experiences and to share that they are moving forward as they have been putting into action somethings taught in the previous workshops.

The conversation then led into discussing “cornerstone.” A cornerstone is the rock upon which an entire structure rest.

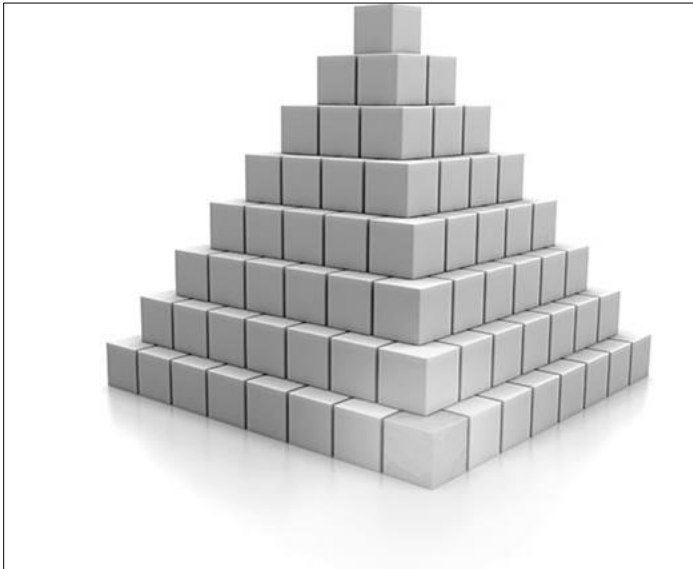


Figure 6. The cornerstone

The conversation continued to address the question, what has been your cornerstone?



Figure 7. Cornerstone based on straw, sticks, and bricks

Is your cornerstone based on straw, sticks or bricks? As the participants began to share their experiences from childhood of being rejected, lack of acceptance, and just being ignored. One shared of not being accepted for a pastoral position that she applied for to a congregation that has been without a pastor for quite some time, yet she was not accepted. She later learned that a male was hired for that congregation. Another shared of

being rejected due to her darker skin, another shared of being in ministry, and although she requested to be appointed, she continued to be overlooked that she no longer desires that position or to do anything except to pastor her congregation. Rejected by man but made for God's purpose was a reminder to all that we may be rejected in life for a myriad of different people but because we rest on an unmovable cornerstone, we still stand.

After much discussion around rejection and cornerstone, I noted that some participants began to close their cameras, then would return to being on, while others held their heads down or just not looking directing into the camera. The facilitator asked everyone to take a breath and to be reminded of who we are as we looked at 1 Peter 2:4-6 which states:

Come to him, a living stone though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Participants were asked to journal the following:

1. Name an instance in which you felt you were rejected by someone, but you believe that you were walking in God's will?
2. How did it impact you?
3. Where are you with it today?
4. According to this scripture, how have you or can you move forward?

As this session prepared to close, the facilitator in boxed me privately stating: You do realize that this topic and project is something that has been missing in the church/church universal and that you have embarked upon a great ministry? So, you will need to continue even after these pre-scheduled dates. I agreed and informed her that we would

discuss later as I was in awe of what God was and is doing. I was reminded that the first facilitator also shared the same sentiments about continuing these workshops after the project is complete.

The participants were given an opportunity to share openly, to breathe, and before our closing prayer, there was another moment of mindfulness. I thanked everyone for their openness and willingness to address those issues from childhood until now that has kept them from being all that God has called them to be. They were reminded of the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Not to repeat what was shared during any of our sessions. The session was closed out in prayer.

#### *Week Five*

My Lord, after arriving home from work and prepared to log on, I must admit that I was very emotional. I was in awe that I was in this program and had arrived at this point in the program. Here we were at the fifth week of the implementation of this project. I reflected on the prior weeks and thanked God for the faithfulness of all the participants being committed to the process. I then wondered if they would show up this week after last week's session. I began to reflect on who said what, some behind the scenes stories I was aware of and was pleased that they shared it openly, but will they return this week? Will they allow shame or embarrassment to keep them away from sharing?

When I logged on at 6:00 p.m., by 6:15 p.m., they began to log on. I was excited, they were coming back. Promptly at 6:30 p.m., I greeted them and thanked them for returning for the fifth week. One participant stated that they did not realize that it has been five weeks as they were being blessed and that they felt that healing was taking

place. I noted that others shook their heads in agreement. The session was opened in prayer followed by an icebreaker. The ice breaker for this session was simple stretching of shoulders, head, fingers, and sitting upright. They were then asked to close their eyes and to repeat after me, a few of the affirmations that was given to us during week two. After the affirmations, they were invited to open their eyes slowly and again welcome to the group.

The rules of engagement were reviewed, reminder of confidentiality must be maintained, and respect for each other. The facilitator was once again presented and welcomed to the session. The facilitator thanked me for the opportunity to present during these workshops. She thanked each participant for their commitment and willingness to allow God to do the work that is needed in us all.

Before moving into this week's discussion there was a review of last week's session. Participants were asked how their week in relation was to the prior week's discussion, the effects that it had on them and how did they process. One participant did reveal that she struggled but that it was a good struggle as she is allowing the walls in her life to be broken down. Another shared that she was able to be honest with herself as she wrote in her journal another shared that they were pleased with process and was just trusting God in it.

She then announced this week's topic of discussion: Walking in Your Worth. She suggested two books for the participants to read at their leisure, *Having a Mary Spirit in a Martha World* by Reverend Dr. Renita Weems, and *A Woman is Worth Only as Much Value as She Puts on Herself* by Nekisha CD Lewis. The highlight of the season was the nomination/election of Judge Ketanji Brown. We listened to a clipping of Judge Ketanji



Brown's speech and further discussion followed. The participants were asked: 1- What did you hear in her speech? 2- How did you or didn't identify with it? 3- Who or what determines a women's worth and why? We also listened to Senator Booker's response of affirmation, encouragement, and support that he provided for Judge Brown. The discussion followed sharing how we need each other male and female, the importance of receiving encouragement from both men and women and how that can make a difference both positive and negative.

The discussion round the events and state of our country that is still rejecting people of color. Judge Ketanji Brown is very qualified for this position to be appointed to the highest court in the country. She is highly educated, many years of experience, was the clerk for the Judge whom she would be replacing, married, and is humble, yet it is clear that she was being rejected for several reasons, but the obvious was the color of her skin. Although several Republicans were against her being appointed, here was one Democrat, a male who spoke highly of her. He showed that he had her back and was not in awe of her record, but in awe of her humility to sit through all the interrogation without losing her dignity and or integrity. He affirmed her, he encouraged her, and he showed his support. The participants shared that this was a powerful moment for a man in his status to support a woman. One participant shared that she cried at that moment and the words spoken by Senator Booker revealed to her that, that is what was missing in her life, getting the affirmations, and encouragement from male leadership within her context.

The facilitator spoke of an example in the Bible of a woman who knows herself, was Queen Vashti (Est. 1:1-18). We read the scripture and held discussion in relationship to Judge Ketanji Brown and our own stories. We were encouraged that to overcome the

spirit of rejection and to begin the healing from being broken, we must begin to know who we are and to remember and embrace who we are. As we prepared to come to the ending of this session, the participants were excited, felt supported and encouraged due to the healthy discussions of their stories and the discussion of Judge Ketanji Brown and Senator Booker. The session ended with a brief mindfulness moment and prayer. They were also reminded that we were almost at the end as next session would be our very last time together as a group, for now. They asked can we and when will you be gathering us again to continue these sessions. One participant said this is a Ruth and Naomi ministry, women building relationships. They were informed that next week at our last session, we will have a guest to stop by to share words of encouragement and support. The session ended with prayer.

### *Week Six*

Here we are, at the end of this project. The participants all signed in on time, and all participants held out till the end. There were twelve who agreed and signed the letter of consent to participate in this project. At week six, they were all hanging in with me as they all stated that they have been blessed and was glad that they were invited to be a participant.

Promptly at 6:30 p.m., we started with a greeting and shared with a spirit of gratefulness how much I appreciated every one of them for their presence each week. I opened with prayer, and again reminded them of the importance of maintaining confidentiality, respect, and the rules of engagement. The session started with prayer and the same ice breaker that we started with in the first session. The goal was to determine if

anyone was able to remember the adjectives and names for each member. The facilitator was impressed with this ice breaker, while the participants all laughed with each other as they all tried to help each other to remember the adjective to match the names of each participant. It was like a family gathering at Thanksgiving. All the participants were now like family. Although it all took place virtually, they have grown to know each other, like each other, and enjoyed each other's company.

The guest who appeared was familiar to most participants. She was introduced by me and those who knew her were excited to see her. She was very honest and open with her conversation. She shared with the participants her story as she is now the Connectional President of Women in Ministry of the A.M.E. Church. Her words were encouraging and affirming. She encouraged the participants to know who themselves and to embrace who they are. The participants were encouraged not to allow anyone to stop them from reaching their personal goals and certainly to develop a relationship with God to hear his voice and to be obediently to it. She stated that there will always be others who will try to define who you are, but once you know who are and that you have heard the voice of God, then although you do not receive encouragement from others, know that God has your back. She shared briefly about Jarena Lee's story of moving forward although her pastor would not license her to preach. Jarena knew who she was and who had called her, and she followed what God had spoken to her. The participants all thanked our special guest for sharing.

Following our guest, our facilitator wrapped up the session by encouraging each participant to continue working on their relationship with God and get to know themselves. She then reviewed some promises of God and encouraged us to believe the

promises of God. We looked at promises in Luke 1:38 and 45 and John 5: 15-11, and was asked the question, what promise do you believe? With that she ended her session. We all gave her a hand clap of praise and thanked her immensely for all that she has shared with us over these past three weeks. Each participant individually thanked her and shared what they learned from attending all the sessions. They stated that they did not want the sessions to end and stated that they were looking forward to the continuation in some form.

As with the previous facilitator, each participant was given a letter of the facilitator's name and t to give her the gift of encouragement, support, and affirmation using the letters of her name. Just like the other facilitator, there were twelve letters in her name and there were twelve participants. The facilitator was in total awe. She became emotional as she received her word from her name. She inquired whose idea this was because it was such a unique idea. She expressed that it was a gift that she would treasure. I thanked her and expressed my appreciation for her willingness to take time out of her schedule to be present with us for these past three sessions. I once again thanked the participants for their time, support, and prayers throughout this process. They were encouraged to document in their journal and when all finished to let me know as I will then arrange to get it from them. They were also encouraged to once again complete the survey monkey as soon as possible which would be sent out later in the evening. The session ended in prayer by our facilitator.

*Interview: Participant One*

First interview after the ending of the workshops took place via Zoom with one of three participant who is outside of my context. The participant expressed just how blessed she was to be a part of such a wonderful experience. She expressed that she has experienced rejection of her life that there are some things that she accepts and no longer tries to pursue. She also shared within the family, where she has always felt that she had no voice as she was the youngest girl and older siblings would override her voice.

During this interview, this first participant also shared her experience within her church and denomination of times that she was rejected. She was told that she would not be able to move forward through her ordination process because she was a woman. She shared that there was no one with whom she could share this information with, within her church/denomination so she held it in for several years and had to remain silent. She also stated that it was good to have a safe space with others who had or who were experiencing the same thing. She stated that she was brought up in the church and always felt safe as a child. However, as she grew older, she realized that the church was not a safe space for everyone, especially women. This participant became very emotional as she began to recall her childhood, the abuse in the home, not having a voice in her childhood home, not having a voice in her home with her husband and in the church. However, she added that due to these workshops she is ready to start counseling. I was able to refer someone to her. Throughout the interview, she just kept repeating just how grateful she was to have been a part of this series of workshops.

*Interview: Participant Two*

The interview with this participant was interesting. This participant was also outside of my context, and an unfamiliar context. She shared of the challenges that exist within her context. This participant also became very emotional during the interview as she stated that it was so freeing to be able to share her story and to realize that she was not alone. She also inquired if I would be sure to include her in the future gatherings because she would like to continue to explore where she is. She stated that patriarchy continue to rule in her denomination; and in spite of the rejection that she has already received as a minister (not ordained), that she is not giving up, but will continue to walk in her God given path. She stated that she was not familiar with the story of Jarena Lee but hearing of her story gave her courage and strength to push on.

*Interview: Participant Three*

During this interview with participant number three, she also started out thanking me for the opportunity to be a part of this gathering with such wonderful, courageous women. She stated that she thought that she was in this by herself. She knew that patriarchy was still leading within the churches but did not realize that there were other women of whom she knew were also affected by it. She reiterated a story that she shared during the workshop and stated that she later found out, that it was good that she was rejected by man in this particular situation as it opened the door for her to move into an area of ministry that she was afraid of entering in, but after that experience and these workshops, that she felt very encouraged and courageous enough to step out to do that which she was called to do. She then became very emotional and thanked me for the

invitation to participate in these workshops. She stated that at first, she thought six weeks was a long time, but that the time flew by so quickly that she now misses the sessions as she felt that they were very enlightening for her.

*Interview: Participant Four*

This interviewee openly admitted that she was nervous about being a participant as she was afraid of letting others know just how she felt. She stated that she felt ashamed and embarrassed as she thought of the things that took place in her life. She reported that she recognized since her childhood that she was different from other members of the family. She was darker than the others, everyone's name started with the same letter except hers and her hair texture was different from others even her brothers. She stated that this followed her through school. She stated that she always did well in school while her siblings did not, so that was different and added to her being different. Then as she entered ministry, she began to experience events that separated her from others. At first, she thought during her childhood that she was different. She became emotional and stated that the affirmations given during the workshops were helpful and that she has been adding to each affirmation daily.

*Interview: Participant Five*

This interviewee was exceptional. As like the others, the interview started with her giving praise to God for allowing her to participate in this process. She shared of her rejection taking place because two of her leaders disagreed with each other and she reaped the wrath of their anger. She was held back because of their differences from

moving forward. She added that she has never forgotten it, but that she has learned to move on because she knew that God called her and not man. This interviewee stated that she has been in ministry for many years and despite what others tried to hinder her, that God has opened doors for her to preach and teach and having others to come to her for assistance.

*Interview: Participant Six*

During this interview, she shared how disappointing it is to know that although it was just twelve women who gathered for six weeks, she realized just how much women has continued to experience in the name of the Lord. That although we all have been called to ministry, it is challenging to know and see that our brothers are still trying to keep us out of positions within the church. She shared of her experience which was different as her experienced dealt with a family church. Although leadership (all males-family members) acknowledges that there is a call of God upon her life, they still refuse to allow her to move into leadership. She is allowed to lead the children in Sunday school and the youth programs, but the one who supervises the youth ministry is a male. She stated that it is challenging because there is no one to discuss this with as those in leadership are family members. She also stated that their sister churches, it appears that the women have all accepted the fact that they cannot be leadership and have all accepted where they are.



*Interview: Participant Seven*

This interview was extremely encouraging as this interviewee shared that as a woman in ministry it has not been easy. She stated that so much has been expected of her simply because she is a woman, yet she was not allowed to be in leadership. She stated that she was able to relate to Jarena Lee's story because although she was denied ordination and leadership, she continues to move forward. She stated that she knows who she is and with or without an ordination she will continue to do the will of him who has called her. She stated that as most churches are now on Zoom, it has been working in her favor as she is able to minister from home and several opportunities has come her way. This encouraged my spirit as she was not allowing anything to stop her from moving forward.

**Summary of Learning**

Qualitative analysis was used throughout the course of this project. Data was collected using personal interviews, journal writings, observations, and pre- and post-surveys. During the workshop, there were no barriers or hesitancy that made data collection challenging. The workshops were scheduled and held for the duration of six weeks, two hours each week with twelve participants, all women. The workshops were facilitated by two qualified, educated professionals in their field. They were ordained clergy women with several years in ministry and who witnessed the many changes of women in ministry or lack thereof.

The first method utilized was the pre-survey questions (Appendix C) that were sent to each participant via Survey Monkey. Each participant was asked to complete the

survey prior to the workshops. However, a few (three) stated that they completed the survey right before the workshop.

The second method utilized for this research was observation (Appendix E). As I was not a facilitator, I was able to observe the participants during each session. The participants were asked to always remain on camera, if possible. Participants were diligent and followed through as asked. As they logged on, they shared of the excitement yet nervousness of being a part of the workshop as they felt it was well needed. I observed, everyone, although some shared about being nervous, no one was observed as being nervous. Cameras were on, lighting was bright on each face, and some were observed with pen in hand with notebook ready to take notes.

Our first three sessions dealt with the psychological portion of the workshops. Self-esteem issues were discussed and affirming statements were discussed such as “I Believe” and “I am.” Although some shared that doing the homework and practicing these statements for themselves were a little challenging at first, I observed their willingness to still be present during the workshops as being active participants. During another sessions, when the topic of rejection was discussed, I observed cameras being turned off for a few minutes, however, they came back on before the ending of the workshop.

Interviewing each participant privately and individually, which was the third method utilized for this research project. An agreeable time was arranged between the participants and me for individual interviews. Each participant kept their appointed times and agreed to the interview being recorded for accuracy. They were assured that after a period of five years, the recording would be deleted. During each interview every

participant cried. They shared that this was so needed and felt that they had grown so much. Although it was only six weeks, each participant in their own way shared how they were learning to reprogram their mindset.

After the second interviewee, when the third interviewee began to cry shortly after the interview started, I asked if she would share more about the tears, she stated that she finally felt “heard.” She stated that she has been in ministry for some time and although she has been overlooked for some positions, she also felt that she was not being heard. She stated that she was able to be herself for six weeks, to share her story, and to know that others were listening really warmed her heart. She began to ask me how she can repay me for this time. This participant shared her brokenness since childhood, during her marriage and somehow suffered from not feeling good enough. She also admitted that the workshops helped her in deciding to finally go get much needed therapy. I was able to refer her to someone. (Further follow-up, she is still being seen by the referral).

Participants also shared that they were happy for this interview as there are things that they were not willing to share publicly in the presence of everyone but is closer to revealing the truth about their hidden hurt of being rejected more openly. During the interviews, I was able to follow-up with questions from the pre- and post-survey questions and additional questions such as their age (if they were willing to share, and their length of time in ministry) and details about their context. When asked if their responses to the post-survey was different from the pre-survey, the responses were yes. They responded that their definition for rejection, brokenness and if they have ever

experienced not having their voices heard was the same, but the cloud that hung over them in answering the questions the first time was not so heavy for the post-survey.

During the interview process, participants were asked a series of interview questions (Appendix D) such as have you felt like quitting? Eight out of twelve stated that they have felt like quitting in the past but knew that they could not. Now after these workshops, they are convinced that they cannot quit. I learned that some were dealing with rejection and brokenness since childhood. One participant shared of the family dynamics within her context and felt that she did not have a voice due to her age, but also because she was a girl. The boys in the family were encouraged to pursue ministry as that was the family's goals. During the interview process, participants shared of being held back due to the disagreement between two leaders in her context. It was also shared during the interview process by participants that they were rejected within their families and within their marriage. All participants shared their dissatisfaction with the leadership in their context, due to women being overlooked time and time again.

Participants were also asked to journal after each session and to respond to their homework assignments in their journal (Appendix F). They were also asked to use their biblical names in their journals. The journal writings confirmed what was shared during the interviews. The participants shared their brokenness, the rejection that they had experienced, and at times feeling as if they had no voice. It was documented by one participant the pain of rejection felt due to her age, sex, and color of skin. She was appointed to a church that was far from her family and friends. She was a Black female pastoring an all-White congregation in an all-White community. This participant cried during the interview and in her journal writing she documented the struggle she had in

affirming herself with the “I am” confirmation. Documentation showed how she felt like a failure, unqualified to pastor, and not worthy. She stated that she needed someone to listen, someone who would understand the pain, the loneliness, and the lack of support that she was receiving from those in leadership over her and there was no one. Her documentation further stated that she wished that this workshop was being offered during “my time of bondage.”

The pre- and post-survey (Appendix C) were used as a tool to clarify each participants response to rejection, brokenness, being voiceless, and to whom has inflicted this pain. The pre-survey was completed by the participants prior to the workshops. After the series of workshops, due to questions being open ended, answers did not really change, what changed was that the participants stated that they felt more relaxed, open, and free in responding. Defining rejection and brokenness did not change, however, how they respond to being broken and rejected has changed. They stated that the post-survey was done knowing that they now believe in themselves, knowing who they are “I am.” They stated that the workshops were helpful in completing the post-survey.

This research project revealed that although there has been tremendous change and improvement for women in ministry since the days of Jarena Lee, there is still much more work to be done. There were twelve women participating in this research project, and who felt that the workshops were effective. They expressed that the workshops caused them to take a closer look at themselves, and to understand that because God has called them, they have an obligation to follow through with the calling of God on their lives. But my question is, what happens to the many others who were not privileged to receive this information? I was excited for their commitment, to the process of six weeks

attendance; however, like the participants I wish it was longer. As stated before, there is a plan to conduct support groups for those who are ready to share their stories openly.

### **Conclusion**

This doctoral project has taught me several lessons. First and foremost, it taught me to trust God. It taught me to trust the God in me in spaces and places that ever existed. Out of this vulnerable space, I was able to face the demon in me that has kept me bound for several years. During our fourth session, the facilitator stated that she appreciated me having the guts to offer these workshops; however, although they have been for others, the work is really being done in me. She was correct because being present for these workshops also provided me the opportunity to deal with my own rejection.

This project was birth out of my spiritual autobiography which was a therapeutic event for me. As one who has experienced rejection firsthand, from childhood, adulthood (marriage) and in ministry, it allowed me the opportunity to be able to relate to other women, it provided me the opportunity in becoming a change agent in the lives of other women. These workshops also helped me to change my thoughts, therefore changed my life. The process of change had begun, however, these workshops helped me even the more in moving forward.

This study laid the stage, the beginning for these participants in becoming empowered, informed, and encouraged in standing tall in who they are and who God has called them to be. This study opened the door for these participants to gain insight into their rejection and brokenness. It set the stage for them to begin the healing process and to see that they are not alone and that they now have each other as they were encouraged to remain connected to each other.

While there have been several changes within the church with women moving in more leadership roles, there is still so much more work to be done. As Judge Ketanji Brown pointed out that in the 133-year history of the Supreme Court, for her to be the first African American woman is shameful. Within my context, we have moved from no female Bishops until the year 2000 when the first woman was elected Bishop.

Throughout the years of the AME Church, throughout the twenty districts, which consist of twenty Bishops, there are only two Bishops currently on the bench. In 2024, six seats will be open for election of Bishops, there are discussions as to which woman would be elected. One female Bishop will be retiring, and only one would remain, so there is discussion as to whether a woman will be elected. In 2022, we are still fighting for a position of high esteem. Judge Brown had gone through severe scrutiny simply because of the color of her skin and being a woman.

There was full agreement of all participants that these workshops were helpful and was very impactful on them spiritually, emotionally, and mentally, yet they all shared that there is yet still more work to be done. As there is an end goal of developing support groups for women who are in ministry or deciding on whether to accept God's calling on their lives, it was clear that not all women will be willing to share their stories. Others have chosen to no longer seek higher positions in the church. These workshops have provided an avenue for these twelve participants and my prayer is that they will share with others the information that gained and that it will become a domino effect. As this is not a denominational issue, but a systemic issue, both in and out of the church, there is a need for change and the change needs to be in the church first. This research project

marks the beginning of realization for some women who have asked for this to continue and asked if others could join in.

Women are educated, intelligent, capable, gifted, and anointed to move in several leadership roles within the church and in the marketplace. It should not matter if we are Black or White, it should not matter where we were born, give us the opportunity to prove ourselves. As women, we must begin to position ourselves to be called upon for these positions, we invite ourselves into some rooms, be available to sit at the table, and when invited to the table to make room for another woman to sit at the table as well.

As this project concludes this phase, I am grateful to God for allowing me this opportunity to have served as the New York Conference Women in Ministry Coordinator for eight years. This provided me the opportunity to develop relationships with so many other women who are not serving as pastors. I am grateful to those participants who committed to attend and participate in the six-week research study. I am especially grateful to the facilitators to sharing their own stories of rejection and brokenness with the participants. I am also grateful that all the participants asked for this to continue and that both facilitators suggested the same without knowing that the other also had the same idea of continuing this ministry.

My hypothesis: if women in ministry are offered a series of workshops and provided encouragement, support, and affirmation in their gifts, then they will feel empowered to pursue leadership roles was proven, as all the participants expressed that they are more confident in themselves and despite what has been spoken to them, they will continue to pursue that which God desires for them. This research project has birthed a new ministry within me. When I entered United Theological Seminary, I had no idea



that I would grow as I did; I grew emotionally, mentally, psychologically, and spiritually. I believe that I am no longer the same person. The song writer says, I looked at my hands and they look new, I look at my feet and they do too. I look at myself, and others may look at me and see the same person on the outside, but inside I am totally different. I have learned to use my voice to share what I want and what I do not want. To share what I will no longer tolerate and that which I am willing to adjust to and move in.

This project allowed me to see me and realize that I did not like what I saw. This project allowed me to understand better the call of God on my life and that although I do not sound like, dress like, or look like “you” I am God’s creation and when I was created, he said I was good. This project also helped me to see and recognize that ministry focus changes as God continues to reveal the plans that he has for us.

Prior to starting at United, in 2019, I was led to host a free woman’s retreat. This retreat was to empower each woman in seeing themselves the way that God saw them, to get away and to be with God. Theme of the retreat was “Come away my beloved.” The ministry name is “Sister’s Beloved.” Also, in 2016, while taking my granddaughter to daycare each morning we began a routine of repeating affirmations using the alphabet. It was fun as she was learning the alphabets as well as repeating affirmations that ended with “I am a Black girl and I rock; I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Another event prior to these taking place, the Lord had given a project for women and girls. To establish a ministry for “Women who are on their way somewhere but has nowhere to go” this ministry’s name is “House of Goshen” for women and girls.

I had no idea that I would be enrolled in United’s program and that all the rejection and brokenness that I have experienced throughout my life was preparing me

for this. As like some of the participants, I did not know that others were experiencing or had experienced rejection even within the church. This research project allowed me to develop more empathy for these women, and to be more compassionate with the woman who walk away from leadership. To be able to be present when she wants to talk, to be available when she calls or just do not have the words to say now. I am truly grateful that God has granted me this opportunity and that God's hand continues to be upon me as I strive to fulfill his will on my life.

**APPENDIX A**  
**PROJECT FLYER**

Women Supporting Women  
 Women Supporting Women

# EMPOWERED TO SERVE

*"The stone that the builders rejected shall become the chief cornerstone"*  
 Psalm 118:22

*Join a Series of Workshops*  
**You are NOT ALONE!**

## TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED:

*Identifying Your Gifts*  
*Knowing Who You Are*  
*Label It - Name It*  
*Self-Esteem Building*

**7pm - 9pm**

**February 8, 15 & 22, 2022**

**March 1, 8 & 15, 2022**

**Sessions Hosted By:**

**REV. JACQUELINE LYNCH**

*Doctoral Student: United Theological Seminary*

**zoom Information Meeting ID: \_\_\_\_\_ - PW: \_\_\_\_\_**



**APPENDIX B**  
**CONSENT FORM**

**United Theological Seminary  
Informed Consent Form**

**Investigator Name:** Jacqueline Y. Lynch

**Contact Information:** Telephone (347)393-4728 or Email:lynjck5@gmail.com

**Introduction:** I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary, 4501 Denlinger Road, Dayton, Ohio, where I am pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling. I am an ordained Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and currently serves as Pastor at Mt. Olive A.M.E. Church Port Washington, NY.

**Purpose:**

I am conducting a biblically based and psycho-social project addressing the issues of lacking support, lacking encouragement, and lacking affirmation that women in ministry or contemplating ministry often face due to the influence of patriarchy that persist in churches and society. This project will consist of six two- hour six sessions, educational and biblically based workshop which will begin on February 25, 2022 @6:30p.m. via zoom

**Requirements for Participation:**

You are invited because you are identified as a woman in ministry or contemplating ministry and has either experienced or witnessed women's voices and presence being overlooked, ignored or unrecognized.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in this project, you will be asked to agree to these requirements: read and sign an informed consent and confidentiality form, attend a two-hour, six sessions workshop that will be held starting February 25, 2022, and return as soon as possible.

**Risks:**

Every effort has been made to eliminate any risks to attendees participating in this project. Facilitators are professional licensed counselors and Licensed Clinical Social Workers. These licensed professionals will be available in the event attendees need one-on-one conversation during workshops and biblical studies. If needs arrive beyond sessions, counselors will provide email addresses and phone numbers.

**Benefits:**

The benefits that participants are expected to receive include but are not limited to: (1) Identifying what it means to be broken and or rejected (labeling and naming pain), (2) Empowering attendees by examining the lives of women in the Bible, (3) Identifying, affirming and activating gifts of women in ministry, and (4) Building self-esteem.

**Volunteers:**

Participation is voluntary and any question that impacts an attendee negatively can be skipped. Participation can be discontinued at any time. Should an attendee choose to terminate participation in this project, it will have no impact on your current role or position within the NY Conference/church, or any other context. Please contact me directly in person on the telephone or via electronic communication if something impacts you negatively. My contact information is at the top of this consent form.

**Confidentiality:**

All information is confidential. And all participants are asked to keep the discussions confidential as well. All confidentiality information will be on Consent and Confidentiality Form. Additionally, handouts of the workshop ground rules and expectations will be provided to all the participants. This information will be read aloud, and questions asked at the beginning of the workshop. All notes and completed forms or information you provided at registration will be kept confidential/private and secured. Trained and licensed counselors will have limited access to participants information, only the principal investigator will have access to all documents. All names will be protected by using special coding to replace legal names. Example would be to use names of woman from the Bible as identifiers. Files will be encrypted, and password protected. Although we will make every effort to keep your information confidential, there is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. If this occur, proper steps will be taken to limit negative impact. At no time will there be video recording or pictures taken. However, principal investigator will request that audio recording takes place to document findings from project. The recording will be kept in safe in my home for approximately five years and ultimately be destroyed thereafter.

**Summary:**

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me immediately.

**Signature:**

Signing this form means you have read this document, or had it read and explained to you, and you clearly understand the above and want to be a participant in this project. If you do not wish to participate in this project, please do not sign the form. Being a participant in this project is your choice, and there is no negative impact to you or your context if you do not sign this form or if you change your mind later. Your signature on this document means, you have agreed to being told about this project, its requirements and why it is being implemented.

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**Signature of Person Agreeing to  
Participate in the Project/Study**

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**Date Signed**

**APPENDIX C**  
**PRE- AND POST-SURVEY**



**PRE- AND POST-SURVEY**

- a. How do you define brokenness?
- b. Have you ever experienced brokenness in your life? If so, what form did this brokenness take and how did it affect you?
- c. How do you define rejection?
- d. Have there ever been instances and or incidents in your life where you have felt rejected? If so, what form did this rejection take and how did it affect you?
- e. How do you define or otherwise describe the concept “a person’s voice?”
- f. In what ways can the thoughts, words and/or actions of another person or third-party impact how you exercise your voice?
- g. Have you ever experienced any instance, incident or occasion where you felt that “your voice” was stifled, rejected, minimized, harshly attacked and /or denigrated? If so, please describe such experience.
- h. If you have felt as if there were persons/individuals that stifled, rejected, minimized, harshly attacked and/or denigrated “your voice” who have these persons been? When identifying who these persons are, please also identify their relationship to you as well and their gender.

**APPENDIX D**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- A. How long have you been in ministry?
- B. Are you currently in a leadership role within your church and or conference?
- C. How challenging was it for you to move into a leadership role in the church?
- D. How confident are you in moving into a leadership role in your church/conference?
- E. Do you believe that your gender has played a role in your denial or acceptance to your leadership position?
- F. Have you ever experienced rejection and/or brokenness?
- G. How do you define rejection or brokenness?
- H. Do you desire to move into a leader role?
- I. Have you ever experienced any instance, incident or occasion where you felt that “your voice” was stifled, rejected, minimized, harshly attacked and /or denigrated? If so, please describe such experience.
- J. Have you ever felt that you have lost your voice?
- K. Have you ever felt like quitting?
- L. Have you questioned God regarding your calling due to the rejection/brokenness that you have experienced in ministry because of your gender?
- M. Were the workshops helpful?
- N. What will you do differently going forward?
- O. Have you found your voice?

**APPENDIX E**  
**OBSERVATION METHODS**

## **OBSERVATION METHODS**

1. Body language was observed
2. Camera usage (on and off)
3. Lack of participation
- 4. Pre-occupation**

**APPENDIX F**

**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT AND JOURNAL ENTRIES**

**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT AND JOURNAL ENTRIES**

- A. What would you do if you could not fail?
- B. What would happen if all your dreams came true?
- C. What would happen if God granted your prayer requests?
- D. How much do you believe in yourself? 25% more?, 50% or 100%
- E. Do you believe Philippians 4:13 for yourself? That you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you?
- F. Name an instance in which you felt you were rejected by someone, but you believe that you were walking in God's will?
- G. How did it impact you?
- H. Where are you with it today?

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